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IRELAND AT THE CROSS ROADS

PRESS OPINIONS

The Times says :—"Full of sympathy, not devoid of insight, and instinct with freshness and individuality. . . . His book is well worth reading, if only for its high literary quality. It will attract and interest many by its vivid presentation of facts and opinions which would only repel if recorded in the arid pages of a Blue-book."

The Spectator says :—"There can be no question of the importance of Mr. Young's analysis of the effect of a too emotional religion upon the mind of the Irish race. . . . Economic questions are treated briefly but with great good sense. . . . We can commend Mr. Young's book to all who desire an acute and sympathetic study of a great experiment—the regeneration of Ireland from within. There is much, too, in the volume which has genuine literary charm, such as the account of the old life of Irish country houses, and the perfect little sketch of a visit to the Trappist Monastery at Mount Melleray. . . . Even in his imperfections Mr. Young deserves to be judged on the higher literary standard, and at his best he can write with great lucidity and charm."

The Morning Post says :—"Searching and courageous in argument, and written in a style that is pleasant, supple, and picturesque."

The Scotsman says :—"This is a thoughtful study of the present state of Ireland, not the less readable either because it studiously avoids politics or because it is written with quite an uncommon literary ability. . . . Practical remedies it does not seek to indicate ; but this need be no reproach to a book so impressive ; for it will serve a good object if, as it can hardly fail to do, it makes its readers realise the full nature of difficulties too often obscured or misrepresented. This book will be read with profit by every one interested in its subject."

Mr. GEORGE MOORE, in the *Daily Mail*, says :—"Ireland's case is stated lucidly as a proposition in Euclid, picturesquely as a dramatic situation in a novel by Balzac. . . . I congratulate Mr. Filson Young on having written a most remarkable book. It is by far the best book of the kind that I have read for many a long day."

The Athenæum says :—"The author writes with ease, often with great picturesqueness, and carries along his reader through many interesting and many astounding pages. . . . We cannot speak too highly of his power of portraying, in poetic prose, his romantic but melancholy impressions."

The Westminster Gazette says :—"Mr. Filson Young's 'Ireland at the Cross Roads' has very considerable literary merits. It is vivid and interesting, it appears to reflect things really seen and felt, and it is written in a style which will please the reader of literary tastes and entice him to read on when he has once begun. . . . In particular, we should like every one to read his account of the work of Sir Horace Plunkett and his department."

The World says :—"We have read few recent pages more ably and brilliantly written than the brief but suggestive work which Mr. Filson Young entitles 'Ireland at the Cross Roads.' . . . The passage of singular beauty in which he traces the influence of the sea upon the inhabitants of the western parts of Ireland, for instance, not only stands out among the writings of Mr. Young's contemporaries, but would bear comparison with the purple patches of the great masters of English prose, being, as it is, not merely a piece of exquisite language, but the expression of a simple and profoundly true thought which has not occurred to any previous writer."

The Dublin Daily Express says :—"No one can take up this book on Ireland without being fascinated by its brilliant style and its clearness of vision. Mr. Young evidently sees plainly the problems that lie at the root of the Irish question. He does not miss the obvious by seeking after the esoteric causes that will explain why Ireland still puzzles the statesman and the social inquirer. . . . Mr. Young can look on the Catholic Church in Ireland without a trace of bigotry or intolerance. He describes its influence on the character and history of the people with a masterly insight, calmly, logically, scientifically."

Ireland at the Cross Roads

An Essay in Explanation

By

Filson Young

London

E. Grant Richards

1907

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

To make no additions or alterations in the second edition of a book on a highly controversial subject would indicate that the author had nothing to learn from his critics—a claim which I am very far from making. The issue of a second edition within a very few weeks of the book's first appearance has, however, afforded so little time either for serious criticism or for its consideration by the author that in this case I have had to content myself with making only a few verbal corrections and alterations.

If I ever doubted whether this small Essay on a big subject was justified either

in its substance or its manner, those doubts have been removed by the criticism which it has provoked. It has, however imperfectly, served to raise a question which concerns Ireland deeply: How much religion can a nation stand? We have a cloud of witnesses to prove that a true and undefiled religion, however extreme, can carry an individual to heights of human excellence which are indeed unattainable without some such ideal influence; but what about the religious nation? Can it, if it gives itself wholly, as Ireland does, to the influence of a great and successful religious system, hold its own in the unreligious world? I raise the question without pretending to answer it.

It is a little unfortunate that this Essay has been least understood by some of those who have supported it most warmly. It has been hailed by them, quite unjustifiably, as an attack upon Roman Catholicism from a Protestant point of view.

Nothing could well be further from the truth. Ireland suffers, in my opinion, from her religion; that religion happens to be Roman Catholic; and therefore my criticism happens to be directed against Roman Catholicism as it exists in Ireland. It is in fact the only form of the Christian religion that to-day is able to lay complete hold of a nation mentally, morally, and physically; but if Ireland were equally given over to any other form of religion, whether of the Buddhists or the Plymouth Brethren, my criticism would be virtually the same. And it is because I am in honour bound to forgo any support based on a misconception of my position that I make this as clear as possible. It is, however, no more than fair to admit that Roman Catholicism has only attained its unique position because it is the most universal, the most logical, and most ably organised ecclesiastical expression of the Christian faith.

On the political side I have been severely chastised by that uncompromising school of opinion represented by the English Radicals. Their quarrel with me is my alleged ignorance of Irish history, and my failure to recognise that the first, the last, and the only word upon the solution of Ireland's troubles was said many years ago by the late Mr. Gladstone. I have, I think, made plain enough my sense of England's utter failure to understand Ireland, and the consistent blundering and injustice of her Irish policy. I think that failure to understand Ireland was even to some extent shared by Gladstone, and is shared by his followers today. I am not alone in holding the opinion that Gladstone looked at Ireland too much from the English point of view, or rather from the point of view of his conception of England's proper conduct towards dependent nationalities. A universal dealing out of Parliaments is not

the only thing needed in such cases; nor would it, in the case of Ireland, have had much effect on some of her most troublesome conditions. Such political remedies cannot affect conditions of national psychology, which in Ireland's case Gladstone failed to recognise. He was one of the very few English statesmen who realised to the full England's persistent injustice to Ireland, and made a noble attempt to set it right. But one may cordially admit that without admitting that his diagnosis was complete, or that his remedy would have done more than cure the malady for which it was prescribed.

That Home Rule as Gladstone meant it is necessary, or would be beneficial to Ireland, is to many a matter of grave doubt. But it is surely obvious that even if we think it necessary to retain the control of Ireland's policy towards others, we ought to allow her to pursue whatever internal policy she would, if she were free,

choose for herself. As she is a Catholic nation, it is not just that in matters of religion and education she should be controlled by Protestants who are hostile to her faith. My opinions on the effect of religion in Ireland do not prevent me from thinking that she should have every liberty, every advantage in such matters that we can confer. Education is one of her urgent needs; and it should be the education that she would choose for herself, not that which English Nonconformists would choose for her. So long as England hampers or restricts her education, the religious hierarchy in Ireland can admit all our criticisms, and say, with a semblance of justice, that they are England's fault. For this reason, if for this alone, Ireland ought to be granted the full privileges of a Roman Catholic University. So long as it is withheld she retains one of the strongest and most just arguments possible for Home Rule.

While these pages are being written a letter from the Vice-President of Carlow College has appeared in the *Times*, in which I am criticised roundly, if not very soundly, for views attributed to me on the subject of Irish chastity and lunacy. Mr. Lalor's letter is a timely and pretty flagrant instance of the thoroughly careless and loose way in which books are sometimes read, and their authors misrepresented. He suggests that I regard chastity as an evil and lunacy as a result of chastity. I need hardly say that not one word in support of so gross an imputation is to be found in the pages of this Essay. What I have attempted is to make a distinction between the rare, intrinsic chastity of the Irish people, which up to a certain point is undoubtedly aided by religion, and the purely artificial chastity so cruelly imposed by the Church, which sees in all social intercourse between the sexes a danger and a snare. What, in fact, the

Church does by this intolerable policing is to deprive the people of any opportunity for the exercise of self-control; and thus, by taking the control out of their hands, to rob them of the virtue. It is not by means of safes and strong-rooms that we teach men to be honest; and the authority which seeks to inculcate the spirit of sexual chastity by denying young men and women opportunities for innocent social intercourse has utterly condemned itself in the sight of knowledge, experience, and intelligence. With regard to lunacy, one of several causes, but by no means the chief which I have named, is this foolish and ignorant sexual discipline imposed by the Church. Nothing has been said in criticism of this view that tempts me to change or modify it in the smallest degree.

Finally, the attempt to impart some literary form to what I have to say about Ireland seems to have proved a stumbling-

block to more than one critic. It is not a little disappointing to find that the sincere endeavour to make the labour of reading this book as light as possible, by sparing neither time nor pains in the writing of it, has caused it to be regarded with suspicion by some people who seem to regard split infinitives, unrelated participles, incoherence, and redundancy as the necessary hall-marks of sincerity. That the book is full of faults I am the first to admit; but I am not so vain as to suppose that it would have been any better if I had taken less trouble with it. I would only ask my readers to remember that it is presented in the form of a picture, and to apply to their judgment of it that rule which forbids the criticism of any detail or part of it otherwise than in relation to the whole.

FILSON YOUNG.

LONDON, *January* 4, 1904.

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I

THE AMAZING MARRIAGE

In the union of England and Ireland lies the chief cause of their estrangement. They have never understood each other, these two; left to themselves they never would understand each other. That common circumstance in which two human beings, incompatible, opposite in outlook and ideals, have to make a poor best of their lives regarding each other across a gulf of misconception and misinterpretation, has its counterpart in this political union of two peoples who by race and circumstance cannot but think and feel and act and believe differently. It is not

simply the opposition of Celt and Saxon, for Ireland is no more wholly Celtic than England is wholly Saxon. It is the opposition of Ireland, which represents a racial alembic of which the Celt is the chief constituent, to England, where the Saxon is also no more than an ingredient. And in this matter of difference I prefer to use the terms "Irish" and "English," because they represent two points of view as sharply characteristic as ever were Celtic or Saxon, Slavonic or Norman.

The first step towards an understanding of the condition of Ireland to-day is to understand the Irish character. Just how far that is possible for ordinary English people who have never either lived in Ireland or known any Irish life very intimately I am not sure; but the effort is well worth making, for English people are accustomed to go far afield in search of countries and peoples the study of which is not half so interesting as that beautiful

country and strange, imaginative people that lie just across the sea outside their own door. And to understand the Irish character the Englishman must first of all realise how sharply it is contrasted with his own. The Irishman is in the first place really much more of an islander than is the Englishman ; the seas that in the case of England are the avenues to the rest of the world are to the Irishman isolating barriers. There are at least three countries contained within the borders of Great Britain ; but Ireland, for all her internal divisions, turns but one face and sends but one voice to the world. England gathers and concentrates in herself all the commercial and political currents of the earth's activities ; Ireland sees them pass her by. While her great partner is thundering in the orchestra of Europe, her voice has little or no part in that vigorous harmony. Encompassed by estranging seas, brooding on her own tragic case,

she lies outside the range of affairs and beyond the world's notice or interest. She that is so rich in history and character must sink both in the history and character of England; she that was destined to be the mother of heroes must be herself an appendage and a vexatious chattel.

The Englishman's whole outlook upon life is at variance with the Irishman's. The English as a people gravitate to the middle class; the Irish are all serfs or aristocrats; they have no middle class at all. The Irish are imaginative; the English matter-of-fact; the Irish are romantic and poetic; the English material and prosaic. As a consequence we find all those civic virtues which go with dull and solid qualities flourishing in England, while from Ireland they are conspicuously absent. The English are good citizens; the Irish are among the worst, and often degenerate when they are grouped in civic

communities. The Irish city is in its poor quarters a horrible place, in which the insanitary conditions of the lonely cabin on the hill-side are multiplied and aggravated to an almost incredible degree. Even in their social disorders England and Ireland are divided. The ruling vices of Ireland are offences committed by the individual against himself, such as drunkenness and laziness; while the vices of England are material offences committed by the individual against the community and against property. In a word, the tide of civilisation runs broad and strong in England; prison and theatre, workhouse and factory all flourish in the land; but in Ireland the tide runs feebly. There are no organised amusements; half the prisons and workhouses are derelict; and only three great tumorous growths stand triumphant and alive—the lunatic asylum, the public house, and the Catholic chapel; and into these the life

of the remaining population is steadily absorbed.

We have here surely reasons enough for variance in point of view; but there still remains one reason greater than the sum of all the rest. Between England and Ireland rolls the great estranging sea of religious difference. It is not so much the difference between the peoples of two incompatible religious faiths; not the difference of Catholic and Protestant, though that is wide enough; it is the still greater difference between a religious and an irreligious people. I suppose I shall be challenged for saying that England is an essentially irreligious country, in spite of the health of the advanced Anglican Church and the Nonconformist conscience; but, candidly, could these two irreconcilables flourish side by side in a country that was essentially anything but irreligious? I think not. Religion in England is a religion of cold observance; the

religion of Ireland is a living faith. Religion is a convention in England, openly rejected by the unconventional, sincerely felt and practised by one in ten thousand; in Ireland it is a national trait. The English are irreligious by habit; the Irish are religious by nature. The English live solidly for this world; they call upon God when things go ill with them, but at other times keep him decently in the background. This world is the reality with them; they only believe in another at odd moments, when they practise their observances, or when they are frightened. But the Irish actually hold a living faith in future heaven and hell, and, alone among the Western peoples, live as though they held it.

And what does the average Englishman really see on a hurried visit to Ireland? Clearly not much of the truth, for one of the chief sources of false ideas about Ireland is the tourist. He goes on

certain well-beaten tracks in the neighbourhood of Dublin, Killarney, Achill Island, and the Giant's Causeway. He has thus been North, South, East, and West; but unless he be a person of remarkable observation he has not seen Ireland. The Irishman has long recognised that the English tourist expects to find—driving his car, or mending stones by the roadside—a hilarious being, with an eternal "begorrah" or "bejabers" on his lips, and a fund of well-worn anecdotes and ancient bulls; and with a quite unconscious cynicism he supplies the tourist with what he wants. Finding himself addressed as "Paddy," he readily plays up to the part, and with unwearied good humour performs his antics and fills the heart of the traveller with delight. "This," says the worthy man, rubbing his hands, "is the real thing. Fine jovial people, the Irish; there's a lot of nonsense talked about their misery. They like poverty; wouldn't

be happy unless the pigs and ducks lived in the cabins with them." He gives "Paddy" half-a-crown, and goes on his way; but he is far from understanding exactly how clearly his prim and condescending manners and his patronising cordiality have revealed him to his companion. The man who was clowning for him so cheerfully regarded him with small interest indeed, but with infinite tolerance and sympathy; and it was not merely the sorely-needed half-crown, but a proud hospitality and essential bounty of heart that prompted the native to come up to the foreigner's conception of him. Behind fastnesses of pride and dignity lay the man's real nature: melancholy and humorous, sympathetic and proud, impulsive and philosophic—far beyond the knowledge or perception of the merely inquisitive.

It must be admitted that there is no existing machinery that makes it easy

for the foreigner to see the real Ireland. The so-called "tourist resorts" which are being planted about the west of Ireland may be well enough for those who like to take their pleasure that way, but they are singularly successful in robbing their environment of all its nationality and most of its charm. There was never any more absurd idea than that prosperity could be brought to Ireland by opening it up as a tourist resort. And the tourist, when he comes in company, has a strange way of carrying with him his own atmosphere and environment which rob him of any perception of the true spirit of the place. Those great gaunt hotels which the railways plant at remote extremities of their lines are serious offenders in this respect. Their positions are much the same, whether in England, Scotland, Ireland or Wales—a tumble of giant scarps and cliffs, as bare as they were in the beginning, with the sea plunging and seething be-

yond a mile of impassable rocks and sands, and the mountains towering into the clouds behind. It is beautiful enough, if they would only let it alone,—beautiful enough for the gulls and puffins, and the few human beings whose world it is, and to whom the visitation of the storms is the voice of God. But they bring the railway there, worming and winding among the hills, and they run up a great draughty hotel, with a laundry and a reservoir and pumping engine. They plant a starveling wood on a seaward slope, and make little walks through it, with cast-iron railway sign-posts: *This way to the beach*, and *This way to the wood walks*. They make a telegraph office, lay on Mudie's Library, subsidise the local church, create a main drain, and rest from their labours.

They are strange places, these summer hotels, and they are a strange evidence of our national helplessness in enjoyment. There, while bleak August winds howl

about the walls and the rain rattles upon the windows, the inmates huddle in the cheerless vestibule, practising every known form of human selfishness in the matter of armchairs and illustrated papers. Such is the atmosphere that each separate group dislikes the others for being there. The very meals are penitential; the "unrivalled cuisine" of which the advertisements speak —ah! who does not know it? There is no escaping it; you must sit it out to the bitter end, with its bad French and its worse cooking; while the little army of Swiss waiters, those half-witted creatures who only know the world of hotels, rush hither and thither in the discharge of their remorseless disobedience. Sometimes adventurous spirits sally forth beyond the confines of the hotel grounds, and curiously look in at the cottages of the natives, as they might look into the lairs of strange beasts; and, in between the showers, others peradventure go forth for half-an-hour, and

wander along the tracks indicated by the sign-posts. They do not want to go there, but there is nowhere else to go, and nothing to do. They do not really know why they are there, and I think they are glad when the storm closes down again and they can get indoors to their quarrels and their novels. Indeed, it is little wonder if they shrink from the peculiar grandeur of the country. There is a strange savage quality about the mountains and the sea that begins to deteriorate when you call it scenery. Who would care to go on to the beach after having read the sign-post, "This way to the beach"? What has the great sea to offer for the entertainment of the frame of mind created by that sign-post? So much direction takes the heart out of curiosity.

In such an environment no one ever learnt anything about the country or the lives of the people who are native to it. Unhappily the travelling Englishman

makes for such places by instinct; and in Ireland, that land of comfortless hotels, their familiar atmosphere attracts and detains many who might otherwise be thrown upon the country itself and learn something of its life. The foreigner in Ireland, like the snail, carries his house on his back; and it is a house of which the windows are few and narrow.

All things considered, then, it is not strange that England should lack intelligent sympathy for Ireland. That art by which a man stands outside himself and beholds from without his relationship to the world is so rare in individuals that we need not wonder if we find it lacking in a nation. But the English are capable of feeling their responsibilities, and from that point of view the effort to explain Ireland is worth making. Some people, it is possible, may think that the Irish problem has been settled by the Land Bill, but no such simple view as that will embrace the

facts. There is still an Irish problem, and there will always be one for any country that has to do with Ireland. Temperament, that most baffling of all indeterminate qualities, lies ever in wait to bring prophecies to confusion, and to obstruct the well-meant efforts of reformers. Infinite sympathy, infinite tolerance, patient inquiry, and ready understanding —these are the weapons with which the Irish difficulty must be attacked.

The country is now at an acute moment in her history. The drain of emigration has reached a point at which, if it is not arrested, it will speedily wipe out the nation; for even now the raw human material of reformation is dangerously scarce. The costly measures now in progress for fostering and rebuilding a healthy economic life must, sooner or later, reach a point at which, unless some solid hope of success is assured, they must be abandoned. The sands of Irish national life

have run very low in the glass; the people are physically and mentally exhausted, apathetic, resigned; the very soil of the country itself is starved and impoverished.

So stands Ireland, weak and emaciated, at the cross roads; ready now, as I believe she has never been ready before, to be guided and directed in a more prosperous way. The Church stands on one side, whispering prayers in her ear, holding the crucifix before her eyes, hypnotising her with its vain repetitions, pointing her eyes to Heaven, and letting her feet stumble upon whatever stony or obstructive path they will; and on the other side stand the apostles of human progress with a message of labour and of hope, with gifts in their hands instead of collecting boxes, offering, not eternal rest in another world, but patient labour in this; not a good death, but a better life. To which voice will she listen? To the Church with its glorious promises of an unfading inheritance and

of treasure in Heaven; or to the men who can only point to the poor stony earth, and bid her dig and find her treasure there? On her answer to this question hangs Ireland's fate as a nation.

II

THE SETTLERS

THERE are two Irelands: one of smiling, one of miserable aspect. The first is known to the many, the second to the few; the first greets the tourist at every turn, the second is discovered only by those who leave the beaten tracks and, travelling far from the railways and even from the roads, come face to face with the naked life of mountain and bog and shore. The first is the Ireland of the trader and the tourist. We have seen the tourist's view; now let us glance at what is commercial and prosperous before we turn to the more sombre study of the real Ireland.

It is one of the disadvantages of such prosperity as exists in Ireland that, standing as it does in the foreground of the picture, it obscures the view and interrupts the attention of those who try to study the country from without. Prosperous and unprosperous Ireland are definitely separated by physical and psychological differences; and to say that it is a strip of Ireland's eastern sea-board that is prosperous is only one and an imperfect way of stating the case. There are two kinds of business which we may expect to find in a prosperous country; there is the business of production by organised labour, and the business of exchange. In the eastern seaports of Ireland we find the second kind of business; the first kind is so inconsiderable as to be out of all economic proportion to the size and needs of the country. So that what we take for prosperity in Ireland is but the stir and bustle of market-places that exist only by virtue of their proximity

to England; and when we study the life of these towns, we find them so influenced by English thoughts, English manners and English ideas that they seem to be more an outpost of English commerce than a frontier of Irish industry. The profitable occupation of Ireland is trade rather than industry, exchange rather than production. Economists, it is true, would tell me that there cannot be exchange without some degree of prosperity, since there must be something to exchange with; but one of the principal commodities by which Ireland supports this eastern trade of exchange is, as we shall see later, not the result of organised labour, but a mere taking out from the land something which is not being put back into it: an expedient not unlike that of living on capital.

There is one apparent exception to every rule which can be laid down with regard to economic life in Ireland, and that is the town of Belfast. Merely as a

part of Ireland, Belfast would be an anomaly, but as the focus and centre of that kind of prosperity which I have just been describing, and as the metropolis of non-Irish Ireland, it is easily enough explained. The descendants of the Scotch and English settlers in Down and Antrim have many of those social qualities which are conspicuously lacking in Irishmen, and it is of their thrift and industry that Belfast has been created. It is the centre and heart of the British linen trade; it has a big distilling trade, and it has one of the finest ship-building trades in the world. It is, nevertheless, an unlovely town, and has an unlovable character.

Belfast is a city of great suburban and small civic life; when all its suburbs are counted, it contains a greater population than Dublin. But Dublin has a great civic, a metropolitan life, while the life of Belfast (if one may use so Irish a paradox) is centred in its suburbs. They

draw off its energies, which are largely consumed in the social machinery of Protestant churches. The Belfast suburb is given over to those semi-religious, semi-social functions which may be good enough things in their way as means, but are fatal as ends. They develop the parochial rather than the civic life, and a town without civic life is but a monstrous agglomeration of bed-rooms and kitchens. In the last decade or so of the nineteenth century Belfast suffered from being heavily overbuilt, which gave a serious check to her growth in the years that followed. The linen trade is not what it was, and there is more than one imposing factory where, for all the busy whir of the looms, it is just a question whether it is more profitable to close the factories than to keep them open.

But happily there is another and a brighter side to Belfast, and it is to be found on those mud-banks and sand-

flats of the Lagan upon which the ships are built. That is one of the finest trades in the world, and Belfast keeps her place in spite of increasing and formidable competition. It is a strange thought that the most worthy and attractive qualities of this town should be found among those crowded ship-yards and iron sheds—unlovely things thrown together to be the cradle of some new invention, and then to be cast down and rebuilt. Chimneys vomiting smoke, sending streamers out to sea to mingle with the clean clouds, are not beautiful things; they throw a pall over the land, so that the seaman far away over the horizon sees and marks this blot as a workshop of man. But they are picturesque in the wide sense that endows swinging hammers and flame-tongued forges, and the endless ring and echo of iron smiting iron with a beauty and music of their own. Here the skeletons of great ships branch from earth, men crawling like

mites in the interstices; here, amid grime and smoke and thunder, the flower of effort is daily put forth for the world's use, and daily comes to its autumn of decay; here, in a thousand furnaces, the fire is made bondager to the sea, and dews of earth rust what strange fishes shall peer upon and seaweeds cover.

Of quite a different character is the rural prosperity of the north of Ireland. The social and psychological troubles that so complicate the problem of life for the Irish people are absent, and the demoralising influences of city life on the Irish character non-existent; so that you have a happy and industrious community living in a fertile and beautiful country. There are indeed patches of country, even in Down and Antrim, where the Irish life still remains unmixed with the life of the invaders; it is simply Ireland without a problem. But the social gulf that separates the north and south of Ireland, the

fact that the counties of Antrim and Limerick or Clare would never dream of visiting each other, and that the people of the south are thoroughly ignorant of the lives and surroundings of the people of the north, is the cause of much unintelligent lack of sympathy.

And here again, in addition to the geographical separation, we have the great fissure between Protestants and Roman Catholics; and the religious bigotry of the north of Ireland is a thing which must be experienced to be credited. In every little village of the north of Ireland the population is strictly divided into at least three camps—Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, and the Episcopalians. Of these, the Presbyterians will probably be a virile community, containing the best yeoman stock of the country, and representing the bulk of the agricultural interest. The Catholics will number in their fold the very poor and those engaged in labour,

with many of the servant class, and an occasional unprosperous farmer and a prosperous publican; while the Episcopalians will be a rather weak and nondescript community, consisting of those classes, whether tradespeople or professional, who regard themselves as of social importance, and who have the mental qualifications for conforming in religious matters to their views of what is socially expedient. And of these three camps the Presbyterians and Episcopalians will certainly have dealings with each other, and a kind of friendly rivalry, as of those who should oppose each other in the same cause. But neither of them will have any dealings at all with the Roman Catholics. It will be enough that a man should be a Roman Catholic for him to be refused employment in their affairs if a Protestant is available. However small and meagre the social resources of the place may be, no one would dream of inviting the priest to any

social entertainment; and indeed, if such an invitation were given, it would hardly be understood. Priests, being in the minority here, are far more tolerant and kindly in their views than their Protestant brethren; just as in other parts of Ireland where they are in the majority, they are apt to apply the boycott in their turn in just the same way. But the two sets of people might belong to different races and be of different colours for all that they will have to do with each other.

I remember long ago in a small Irish village coming to a sudden realisation of something of the folly of this antagonism. I had been brought up as a Protestant, and not only had I never been in a Roman Catholic church, but I had never been nearer to the local Roman Catholic chapel than to be able to see, with a kind of childish fear, the great cross that frowned in the churchyard; and by some youthful instinct I was wont to avoid the neigh-

bourhood of the chapel as a place vaguely associated in my mind with the powers of darkness, and as an environment in which it was far from unlikely I should come by some bodily mischief. But one Sunday afternoon I had wandered near the place, and the sound of singing floated out into the summer air through the open doors and windows. A strange fascination drew me nearer. With a certain inward quaking I stole across the grass and peeped in at the door; and there were the people kneeling very devoutly and singing a familiar evening hymn, and there presently did the priest, a very harmless and kindly-looking old gentleman, deliver from the altar steps just such a simple and fervent interpretation of the scriptures as I had been taught to regard as strictly orthodox. The thing came upon me with a clap of enlightenment; some sense of the injustice of my ridiculous prejudices smote me, so that I went away ashamed, but

still marvelling that so much simple and harmless piety should be found amongst "Papists." But this it was, as Robert Louis Stevenson would say, to have had a Protestant education. This religious bigotry has a blighting, narrowing influence on a type of people otherwise admirable, a type that blends practical capabilities with emotional quickness and alert imagination. The cold religion of the north, by taking the place of human ideals, hardens the sympathies of the people, and explains why a man can turn so easily from the observance of a grim Calvinism to screw the substance out of his poor neighbour.

I have said that Scottish and Protestant Ireland has no problem, nor has that smaller Ireland that is English and Protestant. Some people might say, "then why not try to make all Ireland English and Protestant?" Indeed, I believe the ambition is seriously enter-

tained by some Protestant zealots whose hatred of Roman Catholicism is only matched by their ignorance of Ireland. But though you were to try for a thousand years you could never make Catholic Ireland Protestant. You might stamp out Catholicism, but it would be by stamping out the Catholics ; you might destroy religion, but not before you had destroyed the nation ; and although I am profoundly convinced that Roman Catholicism is in its essence anti-national, I am also convinced that it is twisted like ivy about the very life of Ireland ; and though it will destroy the tree if its growth continues, yet I am sure that you could not uproot the one without fatal damage to the other.

All thought, then, of a Protestant Ireland may be dismissed from our minds. It is an idle and foolish dream, based on ignorance of the simplest facts of the Irish character. Protestantism in Ireland does not increase, and hardly ever makes a

convert. In what I have to say in a later chapter about the unfortunate effects of the national religion there is no thought or intention of upholding Protestantism as against Roman Catholicism. If Rome has, as I think she has, well-nigh smothered the national life of Ireland, it is because the religion of Rome remains the finest, the best-organised, the most complete of the present day expressions of the Christian religion. One may regret, for Ireland's sake, that she never knew that austere and spiritual blend of character that has elsewhere been the legacy of the Puritans; but the fact remains that the spirit of Puritanism is antagonistic to the Irish character. For Ireland there can be nothing between paganism and that marvellous superstructure of symbolism which the Roman Catholic faith rears upon an emotional foundation. Protestantism is the religion of the alien immigrant, brought by him into the

country, kept up for his benefit. He brings it with him when he comes, takes it with him when he goes; but it no more affects or changes the national life than the eternal desert landscape is changed by the travellers' tents that spring up in the morning and vanish at night.

III

THE PEASANT

And now that we have disposed briefly of prosperous Ireland, let us turn to the other, the real Ireland; and by Ireland in these pages, let us for the future understand that Catholic Ireland is meant—that is to say, the bulk of the population.

There are still some who think that the root of all Irish trouble is political, but I find it hard to bring such an opinion into line with the facts, or to doubt that political trouble is merely a result and not a cause in itself. It is true that the chief conversational interest in Ireland is political: partly because of the extreme poverty of social interest in the lives of

the people, and partly because feuds and opinions have been inherited and handed down from the time when the vital interests of the country were absorbed in them. It is indeed a national habit of Irishmen to pick a quarrel about politics, but then the Irish do not invariably talk about what they feel most deeply. Talk they enjoy for its own sake; it is the social accomplishment in which they excel; and in politics they have a subject ready to their tongues, of which the interest is artificial but perennial, and in which there is a large supply of ready-made conversational counters and exchanges. The old political parties are as dead in Ireland as they are in England; the parties now are no longer the adherents of simply ideal or theoretic principles, but of certain well-defined and contrasted practical interests; and it is one of the few hopeful signs in Ireland at the present day that the interest in political

shibboleths has died down, and given place to an awakening interest in the practical economic affairs of life. But still the old divisions serve their controversial purpose, and deceive the superficial observer; still the old strife of tongues goes on, and "to Hell with the Pope!" still answers "down with the King!" as merrily as ever.

Any one experienced in Irish life must, I think, be convinced that the problem of Ireland is a psychological one. This embraces social, economic, religious, and political problems of varying magnitude, but down at the very root, the difficulty lies in the extraordinary psychology of the Irish—a thing as remarkable in its preservation as it is unlike anything else in its essence. I have stated already some of the more obvious differences between the Irish and English character, but to describe in words that strange, emotional, fiery, sombre variant of the Celtic temperament is beyond me. It has been

done in music; but, as a writer, I must content myself by describing some of its manifestations, its results, its environment, and merely hope that some understanding of the thing itself may be revealed in these pages to a sympathetic reader.

A people who live so closely upon the land and whose interests are so vitally bound up in it cannot but be influenced by it in character and temperament. Now there are two broad divisions of land in Ireland. There is the land that is poor and cultivated, and there is the land that is rich and uncultivated. There are also miles upon miles of what can hardly be called land at all—bog past reclaiming, or the stony slopes of mountains on which there is no depth of soil. But if we divide the cultivated lands of Ireland into arable and pastoral, we find only three million acres of arable land as against twelve million acres of pastoral land—that is to say, a proportion of one to four, and, if we

exclude the prosperous un-Irish parts of Ulster, the proportion comes out almost exactly at one to five. So that for every acre that employes the energies and intelligence of the people there are five acres which afford no occupation for the mind and initiative of the population, but are left to the influences of the rain and the sun and the drowsy beasts that fatten upon them.

There can be no better instruction in this side of Irish life than to take a walk or drive through any one of the counties of Meath, Westmeath, Kildare or Dublin. Meath or Dublin are the best, because you have in them some of the richest land in the kingdom; and if you make your survey in June or July you will receive an impression that is almost startling. The road upon which you travel runs straight between the rich, lush pastures. In the ditches and hedges riot all the wild growths that feed greedily and demand rich soil; and one after another lovely meadows,

sheeted with green that trembles still from the last kiss of the shower, shot with the gold of buttercups and all the dissolving hues of field flowers, unroll themselves in a glory before your eyes. Mile after mile lies spread with this carpet of the living and transient grasses. And step after step grows upon you the sense of something wrong, jarring, out of tune. The brilliance becomes dazzling, the sweetness cloying, the richness sickening. For in all those miles of natural treasure, what human result do you see? Here is an Arcady where everything earth has to give of her bounty and riches lies in summer ripeness; here one might expect to see human happiness and pleasure; here find poverty and riches unknown; here discover none but natural joys and sorrows. And yet, for all the sunshine and breezes, for all the laughing, cloud-flecked sky, for all the whispering of the grasses and the shining of the wild flowers, a kind of dusk of humanity seems

to brood over the scene. As you walk along the road in a little valley of greenery, loneliness knocks at your heart, and the nostalgia of your race and kind comes creeping over you. Where are the people? Who goes upon this road? Who eats the blackberries in August and smells the hawthorn in May? You come to a cottage; the windows are boarded up, and the door locked; advertisements of meadow auctions are plastered over the walls; once some one's home, some one's childish sanctuary, some one's care and pride, some one's temple for the mysteries of love and parentage, it now sleeps ruinous and deserted in the sunshine, while the green army of the nettles stealthily closes in upon its final and melancholy destiny.

And all along these deserted ways you shall see, but once in a long while, a dirty cabin, or, perhaps, a small group of dirty cabins, inhabited by silent, purposeless, helpless, and thriftless people, whose

personality seems to consist of a mass of vestiges : powers disused, capacities rusted, ambitions dead, propensities frustrated. Only the religious emotion flourishes ; and upon minds weakened and sapped of the power of seeing things as they are, the Church spreads its narcotic and comfortable cloud of symbolism.

And go forth into the fields, among the starry kingcups and the emerald grasses. There you will find the principal denizen of these fat pastures—the ox. By companies and battalions he has invaded the quiet lands ; he lives and thrives and grows bulky upon it, while the human population dwindles and deteriorates. In the cool, verdant meadows, he rests and feeds in peace. All the silk of the grass and flowers passes into his flashing coat—the dullest and most stupid creature of his weight upon God's earth. And in all this matchless piece of country this is the chief industry—to drive the ox to the pasture,

watch him daily until he has put on the necessary number of stones' weight, and then to drive him forth again to his destiny in the English market. Dozing under the hedgerow lies a representative of the human population, almost as dull and stupid as the ox, without a spark of energy; and with only the will to sit there, wet by the showers, warmed by the sun, watching the beasts pulling at the grass, while his brain settles to pulp, his mind stagnates, and he slowly dreams himself into lunacy. Upon this particular point there is more to be said; it is enough now to note that the increase of lunacy is greatest in the pastoral districts, and that the ratio of lunatics per hundred of the population is greater in Meath than in any other county.

There is, of course, an economic reply to all this, but I am bound to say it is chiefly from the landlords of the rich pasture lands that I have heard it. They speak of the sin of "breaking up the

ground," the most wonderful grazing ground in the world; and they often add ingenuously enough, "and where would you bring the people from to settle on it?" The answer to this argument is a simple one. It is not so much where you are to bring the people from, as how you are to stop them going away. Emigration, which is heaviest from the pastoral counties, would cease if there was occupation for the people. They go because they have no real life, and they can have no real life unless they have work both for their brains and hands. As for the theory that breaking up the ground into small holdings is a calamity, that is a fallacy based, as I cannot but think, on class selfishness and ignorance. It conflicts with the sound human theory that the land is for the people to live on; and, pushed to its logical conclusion, it would urge that the most desirable state of all would be for one multi-millionaire to own the whole of

Ireland, and that his interests solely should be studied in the administration of it; and that argument illustrates very clearly the fallacy of applying a material standard to prosperity.

And even on the other question as to whether it would not be a calamity if all these rich pasture lands were turned to other uses, I think there can be but one enlightened opinion. There is no special economic virtue in cattle fattening in Ireland; it is, of course, a convenient and apparently profitable way of employing rich land with a poor population; but it is not enormously profitable, and it gives no employment to the people. Still less merit is there in the production of store cattle. Here the real profit goes to the Scotch and English farmers who produce food for the fattening of store cattle brought from Ireland; and, from the farming point of view, the large exportation of young cattle without a compensating

return is bad, for it robs and starves the land by taking from it that which is not returned, and, as Mr. Bailey [1] points out, it is not impossible to conceive a change in the conditions under which cattle are imported into England from Canada and the Argentine, that would make the Irish cattle industry at once unprofitable. The old tillage system has become unprofitable, partly owing to the repeal of the Corn Laws which made it possible and worth while to bring corn in large quantities to England from the great grain-growing countries; and partly to the introduction of steam transport, which assisted to the same end. But steam transport has still further developed since then, and may further damage Ireland's cattle trade as it injured her grain trade. Putting too many eggs into one basket tends to momentary

[1] "Ireland since the Famine": Presidential Address read before the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland. By William F. Bailey, Estates-Commissioner under the Land Acts.

economic embarrassment when the basket is broken. The potato furnished one example; the old tillage system furnished another, and it is far from impossible that the cattle trade should in time furnish yet another. Such artificial methods may be economically successful for a time, but they are not sound economy; they are mere expedients; they are too easily upset, and no country that depends on them, and through them on internal conditions for a bare livelihood, can be said to be in anything but an unhealthy condition.

It is not my purpose, nor am I qualified, to write a treatise on economic Ireland. I mention so much merely because it is necessary to my scheme of presenting a faithful picture of Ireland as she is. There may be much to be said in controversy as to my economic theories; but the truth remains that, in these vast tracts of untilled land, we have a population physically and mentally demoralised;

the best of them recruiting the army of emigrants; the worst of them drifting to lunacy; and the small remainder, for all their virtues of affection, humility, and contentment, existing in such isolation and poverty of all that makes life valuable that they are unprofitable to themselves and to their country. They are ignorant, because there has hitherto been no intelligent attempt made to teach them; they are superstitious because, in the absence of all social life, their minds brood upon abstractions and receive eagerly the childish fairy-tales of their religion; and they are hopeless, because they dream of no future on this side of the grave.

If evidence were needed in support of my contention that the turning of the land into pasture produces a mental deterioration of the population, it might be found in a dozen places in Ireland, where an estate of poor and cultivated land adjoins an estate of rich and uncultivated land.

The people of the rich pasture land are, for the most part, as I have described them. But on the stony mountains where much toil has to be expended if a soil is to be found for the crops, where they have to scheme and contrive if they are not to starve, they are intellectually far brighter and more alert. Although they may be even poorer in point of wealth, they have that which makes their poverty antiseptic and not degrading; they have self-respect, and they are by comparison happy. And here we are upon one of those remarkable facts of character that belongs, although not peculiarly, to the Irish. There could be no greater mistake made than to estimate their prosperity by purely material standards. They do not care for wealth, nor would it contribute sensibly to their happiness. If one were able to restore the happiest kind of environment for the Irish spirit, one would ask for sufficient and wholesome food and housing, the means

of festivity, stimulus for imagination, the ability for rising families to support themselves without having to be divided—but not for the ability to make money on a constantly increasing scale. People talk of the misery of simple aims and a quiet life, but to be bound on the wheel of success and wealth is the true slavery. It is a very unoriginal philosophy this, but it is one of which we need to be reminded. The English are rapidly forgetting how to be happy. The love for power and wealth which has raised them to their proud position amongst the nations drags its own heavy chain after it, which accumulates weight with years; but the Irish have, in their own melancholy and peculiar sense, the philosophy of happiness. They have the recipe if they had but the few necessary ingredients.

On those poor and stony lands which the traveller in the west seems never able to lose sight of, the conditions of life are

about as low as they can possibly be. A question which one is often asked about the wilder parts of Ireland is, "Are things really as bad as some people make out?" Yes, things are at least as bad as the worst that can be said of them—in fact, I doubt if many people are capable of realising how bad they are. When one looks into a dark mud cabin, the floor of oozy slime and black trampled mud mixed with the droppings of fowls and pigs, the smoke of the peat fire only escaping through a hole in the roof after it has blackened and befogged the atmosphere; a pig, some children and some hens stumbling against each other on the malodorous floor, and no furniture but a few boxes, a table, and some bundles of straw and rotten cloth—when one looks into such a place, I say, it is only with a shock of horror that one remembers that it is the home of a family of human beings—people with treasures of affection, aye, and of

industry, in their nature; people with imaginations, if they had but room to give them play; people capable of happiness, if but a little less misery came their way.

This is the simple fact about life for thousands of Irish people. It is the great condition which the Congested Districts Board set itself to combat, and which it has been to some extent successful in modifying; and when we come to consider the work of this Board and of other agencies for the betterment of life in Ireland, we shall see with what appalling difficulties they are called upon to deal. The work of some of them is only just beginning, and has not yet had time to effect any considerable result. The poverty of a great part of Ireland is so extreme as to be shocking to every sense, but I do not think one realises how shocking it is until one sees what is fattening and prospering beside it, what is sapping the life of the people, what is draining the

blood of the country. To this contrast we must return in the next chapter, for these economic outlines are but a preliminary clearing of the ground for what I cannot help regarding as a factor of greater interest and more profound significance in the life of Ireland.

The ugly truth is that in remoter Ireland, the peasant, for all the passionate love he bears to the soil that bred him, cannot live. It is not life to exist on insufficient food,[1] such as in England we should not offer to a dog. It is not life to

[1] In a district in the neighbourhood of Donegal, where I made some careful inquiries, I found that the principal article of diet for a whole family was rotten fish, with occasional potatoes and Indian corn. Another family I found living entirely on Indian corn. Neither of these families ever tasted anything in the form of meat, except an occasional scrap of bacon on feast days. In both cases tea was the staple drink, but it was rather a kind of poisonous decoction of tannin, stewing for weeks at a time, than anything like the drink known as tea in this country. The total income of another family I found to be about £9 a year derived from occasional labour and the sale of a few eggs; the total expenditure of this family was about £10 to £11, of which about 55s. would go in rent and county charges. About £8 in a year was spent on food, and home produce to the value of about £5 was consumed by the family.

toil day after day, underclothed, underfed, without the implements of productive toil; it is not life to share with pigs and fowls a filthy mud hovel; it is not life to be denied the great comforting and ameliorating influences of friendships and social intercourse. Try for a moment to picture the world as it is to thousands of Irish peasants. Great rolling vistas of wine-coloured bog, or gray stony mountain side, visited with storms, swept by drenching rain showers, strewn with flints and boulders that "would be apt to be risin' up through the ground as fast as a body would be conveying them off of it"; and day after day the same round of profitless toil, and the weary playing of a losing game; a month's work undone by a day's weather; every single operation to be carried out at an incredible outlay of physical toil, which yet is almost foredoomed to frustration by a blight or tempest. No amenities, no festivities;

even the family affection—that great and tragic possession of the Irish—fostered and encouraged, not by community of joy, but by community of misfortune, and too often withered and ended by departure and separation. And then the fine news from the friends who went to America, of the golden money to be made so easily, of the meat eaten three times a day, of the wonderful sights and amusements of the towns, of the fine schooling for the boys and girls, of the rosy prospects that lie in that land beyond the sunset. And here, nothing but the wild black bog, and the unpropitious weather, and the endless struggle, and the blighted life, and the illness, and the poverty, and the lunacy. You can walk for miles in Donegal and not see a sign of Nature's clemency or kindness.

Along the whole western Irish coast is to be found one great natural influence, unchanging, paralysing, daunting. Not

in vain has the sea roared for untold ages upon these shores. Its giant life has fixed itself upon the frail human life that borders it; and in the faces of the shore-dwellers, in their character and temperament, you may read the history of an unending feud. Even in the people of Kerry, where lingers the most magical charm of the Irish nature, warm, appealing, trembling ever between mirth and a sunny sadness, rich in poetry and romantic imagery, you will find restlessness and storm lying beneath the fair surface. Their poetry and songs, their ancient tales and sagas, are filled with the troubled consciousness of the sea. Their far-away ancestor, sitting naked under streaming skies, seeking shelter from the humid air and clinging mists that even in fine weather float about these mountainous shores, what could his dull mind receive but trouble and wonder from the sight of that furious, wind-lashed army of surges, for ever advancing upon

him? The very clouds, swollen and gorged with water, they came from the sea too, charged with the miserable element that enveloped his dwelling-place. To make a shelter from the one and to avoid the other became his pre-occupation; and through his savage life sounded the drip of the rain and the continuous and melancholy roar of the sea. His sons drank terror and hatred of it with their mother's milk; and, as ages passed, and the cycles of human life revolved, and still the sea rolled and bellowed without change or rest, what wonder if something of its salt bitterness, its mystery and melancholy, passed into the blood and race of those people by the shore? Even on a fine summer day, when the waters wear their inscrutable face of calm and brightness, and the sunbeams are held and dissolved in the gossamer veil of mist, the crumbling, torn edges of the scarps and mountains, the tremendous coasts and cliffs, the wave-

worn boulders, eaten and fretted and indented, remind you that strength and fury lie sleepless beneath the surface of profound calm. And so to-day the Irish who dwell within journey of these wild shores retain in their nature the dislike and terror of the sea. Its mists relax their energies, it fills them with a sense of something always greater than themselves that can bring their efforts to instant and disastrous confusion. While they inhabit these shores, though they build boats and cast nets and go abroad in a timid search for the sea's treasures, they can have nothing in common with it but the reflection of its bright shining in their eyes, and the movements of its unquiet heart in their blood.

The sea, indeed, does little for Ireland. Into the stately waterways of Cork, of Galway, of Limerick, the tide twice a day comes brimming up, filling with its inexhaustible flood the spaces between the

imposing, empty warehouses. But its majestic invitation goes unheeded; the beautiful buildings, raised when Ireland had a population and a trade, are crumbling and deserted; great chambers, that once resounded with the inspiring clamour of business, know it no longer; and where formerly the stevedores sweated, carts rattled, and merchants made their exchanges, little barefoot children now play undisturbed in the sunshine. These western ports were nobly furnished by nature and by man for the accommodation of shipping, but the ships pass them by far out at sea. They just exist, derelict and half ruinous, unvisited save by the punctual tides.

And along a coast unmatched in the world for its bays and inlets and roadsteads, you may note blight and desolation marking the sea's revenges. Denied its toll of commerce and ocean-going ships, it sweeps round the coast from

Donegal to Cork, savagely withholding support and livelihood. To look at the map, one might think there was not a mile along the western coast of Ireland where a boat could not be launched ; but, as a matter of fact, places where the business of fishing can be carried on are but few and far between. The bays are there, and the deep water roadsteads ; but the little breakwaters and harbours, in the shelter of which small boats might be kept, are missing—there is no money to build them. The great Atlantic surges come smashing in from their thousand mile journeys, unchecked by any artifice of man, and where they throw their weight on the shore no boats can profitably be kept. Here and there, where the Congested Districts Board has made a little harbour, a whole patch of country has been turned from starvation to contentment ; but they are only a few among many a hundred miles of want. Nor have

the western Irish people made very much, so far, of fishing. The industry is being fostered, and they are being taught, and it seems as if one might hope for a good result. I have myself seen the result of teaching fishermen the use of boats and the care of nets, and scientific methods of fishing, and it has certainly been gratifying and encouraging ; but these are the artificial means about which we will speak later, part of the great scheme for teaching the people to live. Just at present I wish to show them as they are, untaught, and unhelped. I said that the Irish did not make very much of fishing on the west ; they are only driven to the shore as an escape from the still less profitable land ; and the great fact about these north-western seaboards is that where no assistance is given they are the abode of black desolation and hopeless depression. The people are threatened and menaced by the sea, which withholds its treasures while it

makes continual war on their lives and affections.

And if at the fall of some summer evening you walk along a mile of these lonely shores, you may almost believe you are the last man alive on the earth. The country, untilled, ungrazed, rolls upon every side upwards to the clouds. There is not a sign of man or of beast; not even the bark of a dog, that wholesome signal of human occupation, falls on your ear. The world seems like a house from which the inhabitants have gone out and locked the door behind them, and left you to look in through the windows at the empty rooms. The silence is broken only by the crying of the gulls and by the lap of waves on the shore. They come marching in from the sunset line, from the cold, restless desert of the ocean, reminding the solitary watcher of the one ultimate solution of all human problems. For the ocean is the one great living thing in all this solitary

prospect, the thing that was from the beginning and will always be; it alone, with its wrinkled, inscrutable face and mysterious respirations, is an earnest of the things that go on. What wonder if the peasant, standing amid the ruin of human industry on its margin, should regard it as the separating barrier between him and the world? Enemy and avenger though it be, the track of the sunset across it seems the one escape from it, the one pathway to hope and the fulfilment of life. What wonder if he also should "long to tread that golden path of rays," and believe that it must indeed lead him to some brighter destiny?

IV

HOLY IRELAND

The great unfading inheritance of Ireland is her religion. It has outlived her warlike traditions, it has conquered her paganism, it has stifled her romantic spirit, it has smothered her worldly ambitions; and to-day, the narrowest and least advanced form of Catholicism, it burns with a great nervous and wasting vitality in the frail body of the country. Those who were unconquerable, the Church has conquered; those who were ungovernable, it has governed; those who were divided, it has joined together and led whither it would. If it wounds by the harshness of its discipline, it can heal and protect by its com-

fortable charities ; if it bridles the intellect, it gives a free rein to the emotions ; if it discourages human affections, it furnishes objects for spiritual adoration ; if it darkens the world, it lights a celestial candle to guide stumbling feet ; if it makes the earthly way narrow and rough, it has a heavenly passport to give.

In a word, at every step it creates a need which it supplies according to its own wisdom. There is no reason why it should wound ; but, if it did not wound, there would be no demand for its healing ointments. If only you grant all its premises, what follows is right and inevitable. And so are divided the two great companies : those who do, and those who do not grant the premises. And as we are here upon the dangerous ground of religious opinion, let me beg for the reader's indulgence while I explain my own position. There has been so much written about religion in Ireland from a violently

partisan standpoint that I think it has become incumbent upon an honest writer to explain how he stands. I write neither as a Protestant nor as a Catholic, although I claim some not unsympathetic knowledge of both the Catholic and Protestant spirit. And if to know both the Shorter Catechism and the Ordinary of the Mass and delight in both for their poetry and idealism; if to be capable of some sympathetic impression from the sacred invocation, whether it takes the form of *Introibo ad altare Dei, ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam*, or—

> I joy'd when to the house of God
> Go up, they said to me.
> Jerusalem, within thy gates
> Our feet shall standing be—

if these are any qualifications for the unbiassed treatment of this most difficult subject, then I may claim to be so far qualified. Since any value that can possibly attach to what I have to say

must be to some extent dependent on the sincerity of my point of view, I would crave the patience of those who differ from me, and ask of them, if I lack what they would call the "gift of faith" in the church as a divine organisation, to forgive my shortcomings and to credit me with one essential and redeeming quality—honesty.

It is well to realise very clearly the position of the Irish people with regard to a dominating religion. To withstand its influence a certain intellectual health and vigour are necessary; it leads people by the easier ways, and then supplies antidotes for the troubles in which they find themselves. Thus to resign one's intellect, label it "pride," and submit to the decision of the Church on difficult questions of history or ethics, is always easier than to try and find one's path by the light of reason. It is comforting, in a way, to be told that one's own reason is

a blind guide when perhaps it has just led one into difficulty; but then one either is or is not capable of shutting one's eyes and being led by the hand in these matters. It is, I think, largely a matter of temperament; and the Irish have the temperament which falls the most easy victim to religious persuasions. They are volatile and changeable, quick in their sympathies, wrathful and affectionate; and throughout their nature runs a deep strain of melancholy. Such a temperament always turns instinctively to something of the changeless and abiding, some fountain of comfort which is always accessible, some moral buttress which will bear unshaken the full thrust of a stormy and emotional temperament. To say that the human affections are snares which come between us and God seems to some of us blasphemous; but then, for those whose affections have been blighted or lost, how comforting is the assurance of an eternal

divine affection that nothing can destroy or deflect! To teach that the world and its work and pleasures, because they are fleeting, are therefore worthless, seems a strange and stupid doctrine to those who think it a sin of disrespect against Nature to turn one's face from her; and yet for those whom the world has treated harshly and who have lost their joy in life, how good the promise of an inheritance that is incorruptible, and that awaits their coming in the skies! No one with imagination, whatever his views of religion, but has been caught at the heart sometimes by those heavenly images; and yet the philosophy of them, as it is applied by a religious form so narrow and unenlightened as that of Irish Roman Catholicism, is dangerous, and may even be disastrous.

For here we have a people without that intellectual vigour which in certain moments will rebound from the magnetism of the Church, and keep the mind to

some extent its own master. The Irish are far more emotional than intellectual, more imaginative than practical; and so this philosophy of the postponement of realities, of suffering rather than fighting, of fixing hope and desire and comfort upon something other than the present human environment, induces a humour of lethargy with regard to the things of this world. And it is that lethargy which is one of the most baffling and difficult constituents of the Irish character, because the ordinary practical arguments against it are of small avail beside the unshaken belief that this world does not really matter at all, and that "actual life comes next."

It is a fatal mistake to begin by underestimating the piety of the Irish, or by representing it as an unreal and insincere thing; nothing could be more absurd. It is thoroughly real and sincere. Moreover, at present, it is to thousands of Irish people their only comfort and stay. Through the

dark fabric of their lives runs this golden thread of religious faith, standing for them in the place of poetry and art, and of that robuster faith in things as we see them that enlightens more strenuous lives. It is at once their curse and their chief alleviation. It helps them to submit to misery and poverty; and, at the same time, it prevents them from fighting both poverty and misery. But how far it is a part of the gloomy and melancholy life of the Irish peasant; how far it is bound up with the economic stagnation that has brought this misery about, may be guessed from the fact that when Irish people leave Ireland, and go to countries where a more strenuous life is possible for them, they cast off this gloomy religion of theirs like an unnecessary garment. No other country in the world, I believe, can boast such piety as Ireland; they are of all people the most completely drilled and absorbed in the Christian religion, as it is distorted

by the churches. Yet they cast it off when they leave the country; and why? Surely because it can only flourish amid such conditions as I have been describing; surely because it is only upon an unhealthy and starved life that it can get a firm hold; because it has little or no evil power upon the life that is vigorous and natural. In my own mind there is no doubt of these things; but even to those who would not dream of believing them, I think that this case of Irish religion furnishes serious food for reflection.

I now go a step farther. It is my profound conviction that a large proportion of the present misery of Ireland is not only bound up with, but is actually a result of, the country's religion. We must keep firmly in our minds that it is also one of the few alleviating influences in the lives of the people; and it is this double attribute that has made it so ripe a subject for controversy. The people who see in it only

a cause of misery are very nearly as far wrong as those who see in it only a beautiful and comforting influence; it is both. But it cursed before it blessed, and the country that had never known its curse would have no need of its blessing. I have said already that I cannot conceive Ireland in the present stage of her civilisation without a religion; nor do I think for a moment that any religion but the Roman Catholic could possibly flourish in the country. To abolish it would be impossible and thoroughly undesirable; but to educate it is both possible and infinitely desirable. An educated priesthood going hand in hand with an educated people would soon, in the fulness of time, solve the religious difficulty in Ireland, as it has solved it in so many countries where the people have come to terms even with the Roman Catholic Church, and found it possible to live beside it. But with their religion in its present form the Irish people cannot live.

The social plight of the country furnishes the best possible example of the work accomplished by the Catholic Church. The traveller walking or driving across the wastes of that empty land will nearly always find that the first thing to break the monotony of the horizon is a spire or tower; and when he arrives at the desolate little huddle of cabins or cottages that makes a town, he will find, dominating and shadowing it, the Catholic Chapel. Sometimes, indeed, the buildings are poor and rough; but these are becoming fewer and fewer, and are now gradually, even in the poorest districts, being replaced by structures strangely out of keeping with the ruinous poverty around them. The last few years have seen in Ireland a great activity in the building of these chapels; the very slight increase in the standard of living which has taken place in this period has made the movement possible. And yet it is a movement shocking to every sane

sense. The houses of the people are so indecently poor and small; the houses of the Church are so indecently rich and large. Out of the dirt and decay they rise, proud and ugly and substantial, as though to inform the world that at least one thing is not dying and despondent, but keeps its loins girded and its lamps trimmed.

The ugliness is inevitable, for Irish art is a Pagan and not a Christian art, and the ugliness of the churches in Ireland is revolting to the healthy sense. The sickening images, with their gaudy paintings of pink and blue, the wounds gushing crimson paint, the Virgins under their hideous canopies of Reckitt's blue, the prophets in vermilion and purple, the glare and blaze of cheap and hideous decorations that enshrine the mysteries of the Mass—what are they but the ugly expression of an ugly kind of disease? It is impossible to see these prosperous-looking chapels and lofty spires thus standing on the very

foundations of poverty, without being shocked by their gross incongruity. It is not that they are planted amid the poverty for its comfort and alleviation; it is that they stand upon it, thrive upon it, produce it, and sustain it. I can never see these tall spires, but I think of them as the conductors of the people's energy and substance, drawing it up to themselves and discharging it into the clouds. The shillings of the people, cheerfully given to God instead of the nourishment of their bodies, have raised the fabric of these chapels. Never a cow has been sold, nor a pig been killed, nor a little starveling crop reaped, but some percentage of the proceeds has gone to support the holy purpose; so that it is not alone of stone and mortar that these temples are built, but of peoples' lives and substance.

And the chapels themselves are not the only parasites on the community. One of the heaviest drags upon the life of

Ireland is the religious vocation. The monasteries and nunneries prosper and increase, choking and interfering with the circulation of labour and of industry in the country. The morbid desire to save one's soul and one's self from the world, encouraged by the well-organised machinery of the Church, fills the convents to overflowing. The clear, young, running life of the country is diverted at a thousand points, and turned into these stagnant reservoirs of arrested activity. I shall never forget seeing, in a small Irish town, a girl received into a convent. It was a lovely summer day of sunshine and singing birds, and the smell of hay came in to revive the close air of the chapel. The girl was a beautiful girl, but as she knelt in her white veil she wore upon her face that drawn and far-away expression that showed how far the deadening hypnotism of her prayers had caught her away. And we of the world looked on

and listened to the incantations of the priest mingling with the rustling of the trees and the noise of a reaping machine drawing near and fading away; and beyond frowned the convent, with its gloomy walls and averted windows. The little procession that formed across the cloisters, for all its pretence and bridal circumstance, had something at once of the funeral and the hangman's short parade in it; for we were chanting dirges upon the living, and committing her, warm and young and alive as she was, to something more really tragic than a tomb.

The crowning achievement of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, the thing which is unparalleled elsewhere in the world, is the complete and awful chastity of the people. There is many a country district where that incident which in England and Scotland is regarded merely as a slight misfortune, is unknown and unimagined by the people. I have

seen a man, the father of a grown-up family, blanch and hold up his hands at the very name of it, as though even to breathe it were a blasphemy. And this, in itself a good thing, has reached such a point that it has become a dreadful evil. It is no longer a virtue, it is a blight. So searing has this iron morality become that even the pleasant and wholesome social intercourse of young people has been banned and killed. In the old days Ireland was a country where the simpler kinds of social festivity were a great national institution. There were the "quiltings," for example, when all the girls in a countryside would meet at the house of one of their number, each bringing patches of stuff, and they would all work together at making one of those patchwork quilts which adorn so many Irish cabins. In the evening the boys would come, and the fiddlers' tune would strike up, and the jigs and reels would

spin their mazes of innocent enjoyment throughout the long evening. And so also, in the old days, the Sunday traveller would find his lonely journey relieved at many a cross-road where the boys and girls would be dancing and playing games; and the stamp and rhythm of the jigs would get into the traveller's blood, and cheer his heart for many a mile afterwards. But such innocent festivities are now hardly known in Ireland. The mingling of the sexes, said the priests, was fraught with possibilities of mortal sin; and they set their faces against it. The games were discouraged for the same reason, and, indeed all happy and independent intercourse between the young people was banned and blighted.

The result has been far more serious than the priests ever imagined it would be. It is true that the thing against which it was directed has been utterly stamped out, but ah, what has not been

stamped out with it! The joy of a whole country, very nearly of a whole race, has been killed; indiscretion, that redeeming quality of all youth in the world, has been penalised, and there is no possibility of a nature braver or bolder than the average living or fulfilling itself in this land of restrictions. The people can no longer taste the poor wine of their lives; the vintage has been withered and soured for them, so that their very chastity, of which so great a boast has been made, wears not the semblance of a virtue, but of a blight. And there are even more ugly and serious results to which we must return in another chapter.

A great deal has been said about the priests in Ireland, and a great deal of violent abuse has been thrown at them. It seems to me that the criticism which they receive so freely would be much better directed at the system under which they practise, and in which they are merely

as the cogs of a wheel. It is true that, since Maynooth has been established and the priests are no longer educated abroad, they are narrow and restricted in their views, and not very well fitted by intellect or training for the difficult work of their lives. Coming as they mostly do from the small farmer class, they attend a religious seminary, instructed either by priests or by the Christian brothers, until it is time for them to go to Maynooth itself. And from there they are turned out to their cure of souls, utterly untrained and inexperienced in the world. Celibate against their nature, adopting a religious paternity at an age when they ought naturally to be making love, their condition and equipment are altogether unsuitable; it is small wonder if their methods of administration are not of the most advanced or enlightened kind. Yet, so far as they are individually concerned, they are in many cases the true friends of

the people. They help them in their affairs, settle their disputes, claim for them their rights, comfort them in their sorrows, admonish, encourage, cherish and watch over them. This is at the best. At the worst, they are hard and cruel, selfish and unjust, over-eating and over-drinking —a grotesque and monstrous company. But these are in the minority; and on the whole the priests perform the duties of a dreary life as well as could be expected of a narrow and half-educated class of men.

Perhaps the worst feature of Roman Catholicism in Ireland is its gross materialism. The Catholic religion, I know, is elsewhere so elastic that it may be almost anything you please, according to your temperament, and may be adapted to fulfil the spiritual needs of almost any one who will admit its right to interpret God for him; but in Ireland it is material to the last degree. Its methods are those of

simple barter. For money paid, you will get indulgence on earth; for stations performed, you will get a deduction from your time in purgatory; for certain crawlings on your knees before stone altars your sins will be remitted, and the comfortable gift of absolution assured. The terrors of hell and the gaudy beauties of heaven are weekly enlarged upon from the pulpits and altar steps; and God himself, whom the priest receives daily, is accessible at a price, and comes forth at the chink of money. A curiously bold instance of this is to be seen in the cathedral at Sligo. There is an ugly wooden table there, with a cross upon it, and a placard announcing it as commemorative of a mission of the Redemptorist Fathers, at whose intercession any one repeating certain prayers and creeds a certain number of times will receive a remission of three hundred days in purgatory. And that is only one incident out of a hundred

methods of this ridiculous imposition. The priests drain the people of their money, partly because they are obliged to do so in order to keep their organisations going at all, and partly because of the utterly remorseless greed of the Church as a whole. It acts on the wicked assumption that anything given to it, for whatever purpose, has been given to God, and that anything given to God is better spent than it could possibly otherwise be; and so cottages and cabins crumble and rot away, and the churches rise and increase in numbers.

And in such a town as I have described, with its towering spire and its grovelling streets, what is the life of the people; what entertainment does the Church afford them for all this love and sacrifice? Go with them to Mass some Sunday morning; see them go hobbling in, with a rheumatic genuflexion and a plumping down on the hard stone floor. Very old some of them

will be; a good many middle-aged; many children, but not so many young men and young women. Some of them have gone to America, and many of them are in convents or lunatic asylums. And, with their good, intelligent faces, and kind submissive eyes, they regard the gaudy altar for a space, and perform their little tasks of prayer and meditation; and then they will sit quietly and patiently, exchanging a word here and there until the priest sees fit to come in and begin the Mass. Follows an hour of muttering and shuffling ritual, of a ceremony performed without dignity, of genuflexions and crossings and folding of hands gone through in the most hurried and perfunctory manner; and then the ringing of the bell, and the hush of adoration, real or mechanical, and the swallowing of the sacred wafer and the draining of the dregs, and much work with little napkins and glasses, and the great Mystery is over.

The people come out into the sunshine: the women go homewards to domestic duties, and the men stand about in a group outside the chapel. They are melancholy enough, these loitering groups after Mass on a Sunday or other feast day. The men have nothing whatever to do for the rest of the day: no amusements; no social rendezvous; and the large dinner of the Englishman, with the drowsy oblivion of its plethoric afternoon, is denied to these livers upon potatoes and tea. They just hang about in silent groups, more for the sake of company than because they have anything to say to each other, for they do not even talk; and so they pass the long dreary day of festival, until the night brings sleep, and the morning a renewal of hard and profitless toil.

I have said that the Roman Catholicism of Ireland, for all that it is the national religion, is, in its essence, anti-national.

The only assumption upon which the Church exists is that of its superiority to all things temporal and terrestrial. It is greater than empires; it is envious of nationality; it is jealous of everything which could come between it and the loyalty of its people; it will not even share that loyalty. It is intolerant of all energy which does not contribute directly to its own increase, and therefore it frowns upon the happier life of Ireland. And of all the countries of the world Ireland is the place where the Church of Rome has its own way most completely. There its authority is paramount and undisputed; and there it may most fairly be judged by the results of its reign. In Spain, where it had an equal hold, it has become so corrupt as to be a byword; but we should not be fair in judging it by Spain. In France and other countries education and evolution have robbed Roman Catholicism of its power to ban;

they have come to terms with it. But in Ireland it remains in its primitive and powerful condition; terrorising the people, deflecting their energies, embittering their lives.

It is not, however, outwardly or avowedly anti-national. Priests individually help forward all the schemes for restoring the true national spirit, and among their ranks are found some of the best and most patient workers in that direction. Outwardly the Church professes to help progress; essentially, however, and with the whole weight of its teaching, it opposes it. The first laws of self-preservation demand that if its supreme temporal power is to be retained, intellectual activity must be discouraged, and the free progress of human thought impeded. Being anti-national, it is a grievous impediment in the way of the restoration of vitality to Irish life. The only possible remedy, if the country is not

to stagger on under her intolerable religious burden, is education. Education for the priests, education for the people; above all, for the priests an education such as that which would be afforded by an open Roman Catholic university, and that at some point or other would bring them into contact with laymen and with lay thought. That, I conceive, would in time work a kindly evolution, not sudden or painful, by means of which the Irish people might retain the beloved traditions and the happier associations of their religion, and yet be free from the plague of its intolerable yoke and the visitation of its heavy hand. They may live with it, but they cannot live under it.

I would like, if I could, to relieve this gloomy chapter; and, indeed, I fear that I have fallen into the snare of presenting my own opinion with more force than

interest. There is one picture, however, which I would like to communicate to my readers, for it shows a side of religious life in Ireland that is in itself far from ugly, whatever its motives and results may be, and it impressed me more than any other experience of the kind I have ever had. I wished to visit an Irish monastery, and chose for my purpose the Trappist community of Mount Melleray in County Waterford, because it is the most austere and rigid of all the monastic orders, and also because the community of Mount Melleray, which was established there as an offshoot of a French monastery, affords a fine example of what can be done in the way of cultivating the stony and apparently profitless mountain lands of Ireland. Over seventy years ago the monks came with nothing, but to-day they have a great settlement, with two fine schools and a farm which almost entirely supports them; and they are prosperous and happy in so

far as either word can apply to the monastic life.

It was a wet and stormy afternoon when I left the train at Cappoquin and took a car to drive up the long steep road that leads to Mount Melleray. The rain beat upon us all the way up and shrouded the mountains in a curtain of mist, so that I could see little or nothing of the view, and had no indication of my approaching destination until the bleak uplands began to be divided into fields, and the cross-surmounted gates warned me that I was upon holy ground. As we turned into the long tunnel of trees that leads up to the monastery door I confess that my heart fell into my boots. Again the childish associations of something uncanny, something not altogether wholesome, as being inseparable from monasteries, began to creep over me, and by the time I had reached the door of the guest house I was longing for courage to

retain the car and drive back to the station. But having come so far there was nothing for it but to go through with the experience, and live it for what it was worth.

So I knocked upon the door and rang the bell, and was the same second received with startling promptitude by the brother porter, who apparently spent his days standing behind the door, waiting for the chance visitor. The suddenness of my admission put me to some confusion, and I was about to explain my errand to the porter when he laid his finger on his lips, folded his arms, and beckoned me to follow him. I looked back; the car was already disappearing through the gates; my luggage stood in the doorway; there was nothing for it but I must wretchedly follow the monk. We went down a long corridor, off which a number of little cells like those of a prison opened; but no one was in them, and I supposed that the

monks were then engaged in their labours. Presently, at a turn of the passage, we came into the cloisters; and here were half-a-dozen of them pacing up and down the wooden floor, with their arms crossed, and their white and brown flannel robes swinging with the energy of their walking. Up and down, up and down, each one with arms folded and eyes on the ground, they paced with something of the gait and impatient energy of beasts in a cage. Their silence and the strange unfamiliar sight of them gave me another qualm, and I confess that it was with many misgivings that I made my request for entertainment to the guest master. He, however, spoke like a man, and looked like a man, and there was some reassurance in his company. He explained to me the life of the monastery: that guests were received without payment, and that it was left to their own initiative to make any offering they might choose to the community. He

asked me the inevitable question as to whether I was a Catholic or not, and made some kindly attempts at persuading me to cultivate that religion, and pointed his story with a long anecdote about Mr. Gladstone, whom he described as having set out to be converted to Roman Catholicism but changed his mind at the last moment; although in what way the moral was to apply to me was not clear.

It was then close upon five o'clock, the hour for Vespers, and I was taken up to my room; a small, bare, and by no means dainty apartment, the decorations of which consisted of a crucifix, a cup of holy water, a card of rules for the guests, and a framed and emblazoned legend on the wall which began, as nearly as I can remember,—"Oh Hell! Oh never! Oh ever! Oh for ever and never!" Here I stayed, drumming my fingers, until the bell began to peal, and I went down and found my way across the cloisters to the community

chapel. It is a large and plain building, with two long rows of stalls for the monks down the nave, and a transept devoted to the accommodation of the guests. Presently the monks began to troop in from their labours in the fields; very rough they looked, and very hardened and disciplined were their bearded faces. They took their places in the stalls, some forty of them, and began presently, in harsh and untrained voices, to sing the evening office to an organ accompaniment played by one of their number. I have never heard the Gregorian plain-song so curiously rendered. The singing was hurried and strident, the voices rude and coarse. A more utterly unmusical effect could hardly be imagined, and yet there was in it something touching and impressive. It was their one chance of using their voices in the day, the one approach to human community and fellowship that they had, and I am sure

those hours in the chapel are very precious to all of them. After chapel the guest master took me in charge, and explained to me the rules about visitors: how they must not smoke, nor speak to each other, nor leave the confines of the garden or the guest house; how they were to go to bed at eight, and rise not later than six o'clock. Our evening meal that day consisted of bread-and-butter and tea, as the week was a solemn octave; and soon after this meal the bell sounded for Compline, the last office, which brings the monastery day to an end; and at eight o'clock I found myself in my room. The place was in silence except for the birds that still sang in the sunshine outside; and it was with strange enough feelings that I sought my bed that night. And into my odd dreams was woven the psalmody of organ and voices, when at two o'clock in the morning the chapel hard by resounded with the music of Matins.

But in a very little while I dropped into the life of that curious remote place, where the voices of the world are silent, its interests dead, and where the whole business of life is a preparation for eternity. I tried to throw myself into it as much as possible, for I wanted to understand it thoroughly ; and even in the few days that I was there I was conscious of the hypnotic and soothing effect of so much routine and abnegation of one's own initiative. Never to do anything because one wants to do it, but merely because it is time to do it, and there is nothing else to do, is surely a reduction of life to its very simplest terms ; and the monastery, at once a prison and a home to the Trappists, is a place in which one easily falls into the beaten path of community life. It is a place of silence, strangely peaceful and melancholy. The Cistercian rule forbids all speech except of praise or prayer, and all necessary communication

is made by signs. This rule is only suspended in the case of those attending on guests, or transacting business, but even the guests are expected to practise silence, and, indeed, the atmosphere of the place is discouraging to speech. So, day in, day out, there is, save for the bell and the offices, hardly a sound but of the dripping rain, the chirp of birds, the wind in the trees, or footsteps in the cloisters. The fathers wear a white, the lay brothers a brown habit; and in the long corridors and cloisters one sees them like ghosts pacing up and down with folded hands, avoiding the glance and secular environment of the stranger. The hush of human voices dwells there like a presence, stifling the mind, encouraging the soul. Out of doors mingle the sounds of labour and of praise, the lowing of cattle with the booming of the chapel organ, the ring of the smith's anvil with the Gregorian plain-song. From Lauds to Compline the monastery

bell is never for long dumb, but is continually summoning the abbot from his cell, the father from his meditations, the brother from his work in the fields, the guest from the guest house; or ringing out its message of the uplifted Host across the empty mountain side, where there are no ears to hear or heads to be bowed, but only the idle cattle and the indifferent birds.

The monks rise at two in the morning all the year round, except on Sundays and feast days, when they rise an hour earlier. From that hour until eight at night they are continually occupied with the offices, as well as by their manual work; and their time is so divided and apportioned that the hours and days seem to glide away easily enough. They eat nothing but bread and vegetables, and drink nothing but skim-milk or water, and even of this spare diet they have but two meals in their long day, and sometimes only one. They

sleep in their habits, in cubicles partitioned off in the great dormitory; the cubicles are as big as an ordinary grave, and their furniture is simply a raised wooden platform with a mattress laid upon it. Some of the monks are very old men; and when I think of them shivering in the chapel when they rise in the drear winter nights, unfed, unwarmed, uncheered by human converse, I can only hope that some great inward fire is comforting and supporting them with its warmth. A monk may live here for twenty years and never speak to the man beside whom he kneels in chapel or eats in the refectory. And he may die here, and be laid in the burying-ground among the rows of his unnamed brethren who sleep there, without a human soul knowing what were his thoughts, his individualities, the little mental characteristics that endear human beings to one another. Truly it is an austere and withered life, but I cannot think it is a

difficult one. The iron hand of the Church has marked it out, has buoyed the dangerous reefs and lighted the difficult channels, until there is nothing to be done but sail on into the harbour. One cannot see these ghosts of once living men dreaming and praying and singing their lives away without being surprised into some thoughts of their object, and, in my case, some regrets that the world is so little the better for all their piety.

In the guest house the routine is also monastic. The guests are confined either to their own rooms, the garden, or the chapel; they are expected to rise at six and to retire at eight. I fell upon an evil time, since not only was the week of my visit a solemn octave, but two out of the three days of my stay were fast days, and the diet was dry bread with milk or tea, and fish at midday. But the monks are hospitality itself. I was the only heretic at the guest table, and the lay brother,

discovering this, produced bottled beer for my benefit—a little, I thought with misgiving, to the envy of the orthodox. But the shadow of the Church brooded over even our meals; in place of conversation a monk read aloud to us the sad and repressive doctrines of one of the fathers; and it was strange to hear his rough Irish voice admonishing us that no earthly creature could ever satisfy our desires, the while we sat, contentedly enough, munching bread and butter. On another day he read us the account of a certain pious abbess of Tours; but it reminded me so curiously of Balzac that I was more edified than sanctified. For the rest, there were long quiet hours spent in the garden and the chapel. The absence of talk was a relief; the place made one want to think, not talk. I had, nevertheless, some long conversations with the guest master, who, when he had wistfully relinquished the hope of my conversion, showed himself a

man of a ripe and tolerant nature, who had seen something of the world, and by virtue of his communications with guests, retained a healthy human curiosity in its far-off affairs.

The great event of the day, for guests and monks alike, is the beautiful office of Compline, which, sung just before all retire for the night, brings the labour and praise of the day to an end. At the other services the monks have never been all together; they come dropping in to Tierce, Sext, Nones or Vespers, just as their duties permit; but at Compline all are present, and the community sings as a family those simple prayers for safety and protection through the night, of which the office is mainly composed. With it are sung the Angelus and the beautiful antiphon *Salve Regina*, which in its endless roll of Gregorian melody expresses all the simplicity and endurance of the first faith that inspired it. It is a strangely touching

occasion this, in the deepening gloom of the chapel; all these poor Irishmen, living in a dream, gathering round the emblems of their faith to close another day of their stony pilgrimage; and, when the last words have been said, passing, guests and monks alike, before the father Abbot to receive his benediction and aspersion of holy water. And then wordlessly, silently, in solitude to bed, while the daylight still lingers in empty cloister and garth.

Such an occasion cannot but leave curiously definite and disturbing impressions. I shall long see the rough, seared, homely faces and hear the harsh, strong voices echoing amid the garish decorations of the chapel; long hear the monitory voice of the bell, and the slamming of the great breviaries when the office is ended; long see the sad, ghostly figures shuffling on their way to rest through the shadowed cloisters.

But it is when we look back upon the

moments of our lives that their colours come out most vividly. Until I die, I think that the echo of that mountain psalmody will remain with me. It was with the feelings of one released from prison that I passed outside the gloomy gates, and tasted once again the freedom of the open hillside. The morning air was warm and brilliant with sunshine; the hedgerows sent up an intoxicating perfume, birds were singing, bees humming, and butterflies circling in the fragrant summer wind; and yet, even while these were playing upon my bleached sensations, my mind was filled with a graver consciousness. The sad austere life that I had so gladly quitted, that I would not have returned to for a king's ransom—it was that upon which memory clung and hovered; and the faces of the men who had left the world haunted me like a cloud of witnesses. As the road wound downwards it became sweeter; pine-trees

sprang up to meet us, towered behind us, and then gave place to oak and hazel and arbutus, and we joined a roaring mountain stream that was leaping down to the sea. We were all going back to the world together, the mountain road to the green plain, the stream to plunge and lose itself in the ocean, I to dip again into my small world of life. We are all, I suppose, self-absorbed in such moments; I suppose I was thinking not really of the monks, but of myself, conscious that I had escaped, blessing God that it was not my fate to be caught into the dread harmony of that existence. The endless Gregorian melodies were still humming in my ears, the sad faces still visible, the eternal sadness of that life of pious hours still knocking on my heart, when of a sudden something seemed to give way and snap. The trying memories of those days, the good affections and interests that made my world, the heavenly sunshine and

living flowers, all rushed together into one impression of melody and formed themselves into a fragment of rapturous heart-breaking music that remains with me still as the voice of that morning.

V

THE DOUBLE LEAK

The decrease in the population in Ireland is a gross fact which the simplest mind can lay hold of as an indication of something seriously amiss in the national condition; but the causes that lie at the root of it are a fruitful subject of difference among sociologists of the profoundest thought. The train of causes on the economic side do not take one back very far. The population diminishes because the people emigrate; they emigrate because there is not work for them to do in their own country; there is not work for them to do because—and here the reasons

spread out into a variety of figures and statistics which, however accurate and convincing they may be, cannot but leave one with the feeling that the last word has not been said on the subject. In an earlier chapter I mentioned what every one who knows the country knows as a matter of course; that the Irish are not discontented by nature, do not want money for its own sake, and are all too capable of dwelling happily even in extreme poverty. The prospect of lucrative employment and high wages is not enough to account for the continual stream of emigration amongst a people who bear a passionate devotion to the soil that bred them; we must look deeper for the moving causes of their discontent. We shall find that it is more spiritual than material, that the hunger which drives them westward is a diviner and more compelling thing than the hunger of the body, and that when they go forth from their own poor and beloved soil it is

in quest not so much of ampler means of life as of life itself.

Queenstown is the great physical leak in Ireland through which, during the last fifty years, her life has been steadily drained, and through which it is still draining, although on a decreasing scale. The decrease is not yet because of any considerable improvement in the conditions of life, but because the source of the outgoing stream has fallen so low that it cannot continue to flow at the same pressure. The emigrant himself has been the subject of innumerable poems and outpourings of sympathy, and it is still customary for those who like to have their feelings harrowed to go to Queenstown and see the departure of ships carrying emigrants. But it is not by the emigrant himself that our sympathies are most needed. He, at any rate, when the pangs of parting are over, is going to a new life, how new, how full, and how rich in wide

possibilities he cannot know until he has plunged into it. The Irishman in America is not so picturesque a person as the Irishman in his own country, and undoubtedly he loses some of those qualities which flourish abundantly in the poorer soil of his life at home; but still he goes to a world in which he can live, in which his energies and hopes are encouraged, and which does not stifle and wither his growth as a human being. The truly melancholy prospect is that of the place which he leaves, the people whom he leaves, and the conditions which cast him out. He is right to go; and the country that wishes to keep him must first of all make life possible.

But there is another leakage in the life of Ireland, strangely involved as regards its causes with the physical emigration, and that is the mental leakage, the increase of lunacy. It is not a subject which lends itself to picturesque treatment, and it has

none of the obviously pathetic and dramatic qualities that inspire the writers of patriotic poems and wailful songs. But as surely and as steadily as the physical life of Ireland has been drained out of her by emigration, just so surely and steadily is her mental and intellectual vigour being tapped and drained off into the vacant world of lunacy. The healthy mind is apt to revolt at the thought, and to assert with loud assurance that the thing is untrue and exaggerated. Exaggerated it may be by some people, but when all exaggeration has been allowed for, the cold fact remains that lunacy in Ireland is on the increase, and that it is already in excessive proportion even as compared with other Western countries in which lunacy is also increasing. There is always a tendency amongst people not to credit things like this; they are so hateful and mysterious that we tend to persuade ourselves into the comfortable belief that matters are not so bad as they are repre-

sented to be. The whole subject is one which sane people instinctively avoid; and yet all those gloomy buildings with their inhabitants of vacant and perverted mind are a part of the burden of our civilisation, and are a result of certain causes which we cannot afford to ignore.

In Ireland particularly, the whole subject of lunacy is one which I think demands a very full and expert inquiry. The methods adopted in the certifying of lunatics seem to me far from satisfactory. I think I am right in saying that the names of two dispensary doctors are required on a certificate; they receive a fee if a certificate of lunacy is granted, but if after examination of the patient they decide that he or she is not a lunatic and that no certificate is required, they get no fee. This is surely an unwise and dangerous way of conducting such important inquiries in a country where medical men find it hard to make even a modest liveli-

hood. Such a suggestion does not involve any reflection upon medical men as a whole; but the line which divides a lunatic from a sane person is admittedly a very narrow one, and it is not always an easy matter to decide whether or not a certificate ought to be granted. A full inquiry might possibly reveal the fact that in Ireland we are even manufacturing lunatics by the very machinery which is designed for their treatment; for once a person whose mind is at all disturbed in balance is confined in a county lunatic asylum, there is not much chance of his sanity being saved or preserved. It is a ghastly suggestion, and one would gladly think that it was without foundation; but that, at any rate, is a point which expert inquiry could easily settle.

Even this is but a small thing compared with the greater social causes which go to produce this mental blight in Ireland. There are various theories with regard to the principal causes of the disease. Some

attribute it to the constant drinking of bad and fiery spirits; but then the men are the chief consumers of spirits, and the men are in a minority amongst the lunatics. Others attribute it to excessive indulgence in tea, a beverage which among the Irish is quite poisonous owing to their method of keeping it for ever stewing and brewing until it is thick and black and bitter. Others, again, regard lunacy in Ireland not so much as an increasing disease as a phenomenon presented by the survival of the unfittest—that is to say, a remainder of the less robust and capable left when all the strong-minded and able-bodied have emigrated. All these, I think, may be contributing causes, but none of them seems like a primary cause. The third view would account satisfactorily enough for a large ratio of the lunacy in proportion to the remaining population of the country. But it would hardly account satisfactorily for the fact that the gross

annual number of lunatics certified increases, while the number of emigrants, as well as the gross population of the country, diminishes.

At the risk of appearing to be governed by an obsession, I must go back and say that the chief cause of this mental rot appears to me to be the social desolation of the people, working upon minds weakened and demoralised by religion. The physical body of Ireland is frail and weak, but its religious heart is strong, nervous, and vital; there are no restraints or checks upon it; it feeds upon the mind and the emotions; and being admittedly the stronger life, it wastes and devours the already enfeebled independent life of the mind. The perfect lunatic is a person whose mind is entirely occupied by abstractions, who has lost his touch with material things, in whom all ideas are detached, or, at any rate, do not bear that ordered relation to each other which by

common consent we regard as sanity. And that is exactly the condition of mind which peasant life in Ireland tends to produce. It must be clearly understood that I do not refer to religious mania, but to ordinary lunacy. Some people would expect to find religious mania prevalent in a social condition such as I have been describing, but it is not so in Ireland. The reason, I take it, is twofold. The Roman Catholic religion does not produce, even in unbalanced minds, that revolting form of melancholia which induces people to sing hymns and divest themselves of all their clothing; that comes from religious systems which merely excite emotion, and do not satisfy it. But the Catholic religion, like all well-organised religions, is too protective and satisfying to excite religious mania; it at least takes care of its subjects, and provides them with all emotional necessaries. But there are, I have no doubt, hundreds of people in

convents and monasteries who are really religious lunatics, and would be certified as such if they were in the outer world. As it is, they are honoured for their remarkable piety.

I have spoken of social isolation; that is one great cause of mental weakness. The contact of human minds with each other, the exchange of ideas, the development of knowledge, observation, and mental activity induced by human intercourse, are among the great strengthening forces which thousands of Irish people are virtually deprived of. Added to this social sterility, you have absence of occupation for the individual mind and initiative, for the mere business of living from hand to mouth occupies only a very small portion of a healthy man's activities. And in the pastoral counties, where the ratio of lunatics is higher than in any other part of Ireland, both these conditions are extreme. The life of a human being who

spends his time drowsing in a field and watching the cattle feeding furnishes no grist for his intellectual mill; and when, in addition, he has no social life or intercourse to provide him with human interest, his mind must necessarily tend to vacancy. And then comes religion and plants itself in this fallow soil, filling it with ideas which bear no relationship to its material environment, teaching it that the very earth by which, if it were alive, it might educate and develop itself, is an unreal and passing dream; and that the true life is revealed in a series of statements and dogmas, and, above all, in that most dangerous and weakening of all influences, a blind faith in things which are to be taken on trust like a physical dose taken with eyes shut and nostrils held. You have there an ideal condition for the production of those melancholy phantasms which constitute the mental world of the lunatic.

There is another and still more unpleasant side to the question which I have only the heart to touch upon lightly, and that is to be found in the effect of the rigid sexual discipline imposed by the Church. For this absorbing, compelling, and inspiring influence is choked from its very birth in the Irish people. That divine force which can sweep us entirely outside ourselves, which builds the histories of empires and of races, is in this case shackled and directed by the ecclesiastical police force. Like the Danish king sitting before the great flood of the sea and commanding its movements, the Irish priests have commanded that this great primitive force of nature shall hold back its tides at their bidding, or flow only in the channels ordained for it by the Church.

The letter of their ordinances seems to be obeyed; but the great spirit of nature still breathes and moves according to her intention, unchanged and unweakened by

all the incantations of all the churches. Its human results they do in a way dam up and divert; but, like all interferences with the course of nature, it is but a diversion that they produce, and one that makes for a greater and more tragic unhappiness than that which they sought to prevent. For the frustrated sexual life of this unhappy community, weakened as it may be by discipline, must ultimately find its escape and effluence. It but turns from a beneficent to a bitter power when its purpose is denied it, but it is only the quality and not the power itself that changes. There may be no bastards in Ireland, but a hundred bastards would, in Ireland's peculiar circumstances, be a more gracious and healthy sign than one lunatic; and if you follow back the course of this strange, perverted, embittered stream of nature; if you go to the lunatic asylums and question those who have charge of them, and study their pathology, you will

find an unbroken line of evidence joining the strange unnatural flower of so-called chastity with the ugly fungus of sexual lunacy. It is not that the Irish are by nature what is called unchaste, and that this great moral policing has been necessary on social grounds. The very reverse is the case. Warm-hearted as they are, they are cool-blooded; and nowhere in the world is the family a more sacred institution than it is in Ireland. So far as statistics are concerned there might be little enough change if this ban of the Church upon free social intercourse were suddenly removed; but what an upspringing of life and happiness, of incentive and industry there would be!

Evidence for all these statements would make dreary and unsavoury reading, but I do not think they will be contradicted by any person whose knowledge of Ireland is sympathetic and unbiassed. I will give but one more ugly fact, and that is that

in the lunatic asylums of Ireland you will find an undue proportion of physically healthy young women of a marriageable age. And even among those who do marry the evil still persists ; for the priests, in their terror of what the Church describes as "mortal sin," rush the people into early marriages in which mutual choice, as often as not, plays little or no part. The large families produced by these early marriages contribute materially to the two leaks in Irish life ; for where the means are so small and the families so large, proper feeding is impossible, and the tendency to lunacy frightfully increased among the weaklings ; while those who do grow up and are strong have no means of support from the soil which produced them, and join, in their turn, the stream of emigration.

So here again the evidence of facts points out the Church as a chief offender. Anti-national and anti-social in all but a very narrow sense, it must stand to be

judged by the state of the society over which it holds an undisputed sway. It is a society rotten at the heart, and consequently rotten throughout. It is enslaved, and therefore its activities are restricted; it is without social admixture, and therefore it is without gladness of heart; its intellect is dominated and therefore it produces little or nothing and cannot keep even what it produces. Such strong intellectual life as it does produce cannot exist in its environment, and therefore must seek another and more congenial atmosphere. The crowning indictment of the religious social system of Ireland is that a strong mind, a brave heart, a life that refuses to keep within the boundaries assigned to it by the iron and inhuman law, cannot exist there, cannot come to itself there, to be stimulated or regulated. And so the emigrant ships are filled, and so also is preserved that melancholy survival—the survival of the unfittest.

VI

SOCIAL LIFE IN IRELAND

THE statement that there are but two classes in Ireland, serfs and aristocrats, may lend itself to controversy, but it remains broadly true. The Irish middle-class, such as it is, is entirely artificial, a product of the large towns; and, unlike England, where the upper and lower classes are parasites on the middle-classes, in Ireland the middle-class is a parasite on the others. The aristocrats are often the peasants, and you will find many a landed proprietor with an instinct of serfdom to ideals and forces which have enslaved him; but the two classes represent the two main points of view in Irish

life. We have seen something of the peasant; now let us turn the picture, and see the other side of social life which, placid and forgotten and remote as it may seem, is not without its magnetic influences on the country's destiny.

If you climb a hill in almost any county in Ireland you are aware of the principle of distribution that remains practically constant. The rolling green carpet of untilled fields, seamed with a network of stone walls, is heavily dotted with those darker green plantations that mark an important residence. The white cottages and cabins of the labourers are few and small, but the seats of the mighty are frequent enough. Who lives there? you ask, and are forthwith furnished with a patter of titles. There seem to be more lords than labourers in your view; and, unless you know Ireland, or are a close student of Debrett, you will as likely as not never have heard of half the names

before. Their castles surround you, beautiful of name and aspect, and wearing an expression of pride and reserve upon the worn stone walls that gleam between the trees.

Looked at more nearly, they change their aspect, these social strongholds. The beauty increases, the garment of reserve is put off, and you are received into a life that, of all I know, is the quietest and most far from what we call realities. It lacks the stately and feudal solemnity that enfolds the great houses of England; but it has a more human and intimate charm than theirs. You may travel for a month in one county, visiting from one small, self-contained colony to another, and you will travel far through the geography of human nature, as well as enjoy an infinite variety of material setting; but the atmosphere remains the same, wrapping you in its domesticity, isolating you from the world.

The soft climate that explains so much of social and economic Ireland comes clinging over the trees, across the lawns, hovering over the high walled gardens; and if you would see these places when they are most themselves, you must see them in the early autumn, when the roses are seeding and scattering and the garden's more substantial and luxuriant children are thrusting their lambent growths amid the green ruin. The houses themselves are often strange in architecture, full of builders' contrivances and local makeshifts for what was too costly to bring from afar, and when they were new many of them must have been ugly. But the busy climate, the busy creepers and busy Time soon round off their eccentricities and clothe them with a merit greater than that of architecture. You see them in all stages of repair and decay. There is the house patched and mended with loving solicitude as

each generation succeeds to its heritage of affection and encumbrance; where the children go without luxuries that the place may be kept up; where the boys' education is curtailed, in order that there may be no reproaches when the will is opened. But this is not so frequent a case as that other, in which the old house itself is starved to pay for the son in the English regiment, and where the plaster peels from the walls so that his uniform may blaze with the best.

They dot the inland country, and they go down to the sea in troops. All along the deep indentations of the western coast, where the salt water brims upon the verge of wooded lawns and capes, they stand upon the water's edge and regard each other across the havens and loughs. But by sea or land they all retain a curious quality of their own, proud and tender and remote, with a kind of hush brooding about them, to remind

one that their great social days are over.

For there was a time in Ireland when these country houses brimmed with life and festivity, when hospitality flowed from them all the year round. Days of hard riding, hard drinking, hard dancing, and deep sleeping, they cradled some of Ireland's most brilliant social traditions, and gave her some of her bravest men and most lovely women. The simplicity and homeliness of those jovial days saved them from the social blight which too much artificiality and civilisation spreads, and kept their humanity sweet and wholesome. How far we have drifted from those days may be realised from a story I heard of one of these old Irish houses. It was a house in Galway, the seat of one of the oldest Galway families, noted for its hospitalities. Once when a dance was being given there, and the invitations had been on the

handsome scale of the entertainment, it was discovered that about twice as many people had been offered accommodation as the house could put up. But such a matter did not trouble the genial hosts. Dancing went on till about four o'clock in the morning, when the ladies all retired and filled the available beds in the house. There they slept in peace until seven o'clock, when they were awakened by the passage of the butler up and down the corridors, ringing a loud bell, and crying out—"Get up, girls; the boys wants the beds!"

I recall two Irish homes that impressed me vividly, as containing, each in its way, two eminently characteristic Irish qualities perfectly preserved. The first is many miles inland, but raised high enough for you to see the shining of a great river near the horizon, and for an occasional drift of sea spray to sting the autumn flowers when the south-west gales are

heavy. An old house in a great park, in one of the very remotest corners of Ireland, it is the home and almost the single interest of three maiden ladies. There they live, wrapped in the fine dignity of their estate, enfolded in the silence and isolation of their home, with time to listen to the voices of the bees and to watch the flowers growing; with room in their lives to care for every single tree in their park, as well as for every single soul upon their estate; driven in upon themselves and each other, and yet diffusing an atmosphere of affection and intimacy with those who work for them. The days pass by with the weather for the chief news; and the reverberations of the great world impinge but faintly upon the silence of these domestic cloisters. If there is a tree down in a storm, or the bees show signs of swarming, the *Times* will, as likely as not, go unread; trouble in the Balkans is of less interest than the appearance of

disease in the strawberry beds, and a revolution in the chicken house of more importance than a debate in the House of Lords. One would need to be a dull dog indeed, or very much deafened and stupefied by the noise of the world, not to hear the delicate rhythm and music of such lives, or to imagine mental stagnation to be a necessary result of so much minute and peaceful business. For surely no human being can be so remotely isolated, but some current from the tide of destiny finds him out and scours at his heart; and it is not only those in the serried front ranks of the fight that the long, dropping shots of time and death discover. Fair as that place is, I saw it blotted out in a moment by a squall that came up from the sea, roared in the great trees, and drowned the rattling window-panes; and, again as it passed, the sun gleamed on the distant river as though it shone upon the world while we looked on from a streaming

cloud. The brutal quickness of the change, the sudden flash of cruelty preceded and followed by a long, drowsy brightness, would furnish a parable of the circumstances of that household. I thought so then, while I yet shared its magic detachment; I think so now, when I remember that far-away life, ruled by the affections and by peaceful habit.

For another Irish picture, come with me to a distant western promontory, where a castle, rooted beneath the waves, stands in the eye of the wind and the setting sun. Its terraced garden goes down to the brown rocks and the sea wall, but so snugly does it lie that the rollers when they break fly high over it, and spend their spray on the towers and battlements beyond. The bright globes of the fuschias glow in their thousand red lights through a tangle of greenery, but they alone, with a few hardy survivors of man's neglect, furnish the decoration of that wild

garden. The hay lies drying upon the lawns, the nettle and the poppy riot together in the flower-beds; over gravel and sward, path and pleasaunce, the green tide of nature has come rolling in, breaking through the barriers of box and coping until it has flooded the garden with luxuriant disorder. And when you enter the house and pass through its chambers, you might be in a museum or habitation of the dead. The silent old butler has faded daily with the carpets and hangings until he has become but a human remnant, living in memories, polishing at the plate that is never used, keeping aired the chambers for visitors who never come. Much of the great house is ruinous; in the ball-room that not so many years ago resounded to music and laughter, and where so many pretty eyes kindled and languished, the rain water lies in pools upon the rare polished floor. And all the chambers and galleries are filled with the

drowsy continuous voice of the sea; and wherever you go, in hall or saloon, portraits of old Irishmen, merry of eye, long-nosed, and loose of mouth, fix their gaze upon you as you enter by one door, and stare after you as you go out by another.

In the very heart of this forsaken temple, like a spider in his web, sits, until death summons him, the owner and lord of it all. Lonely and miserable, he cherishes his loneliness and misery as though they were virtues. To the rare visitors who find their way to his retreat he extends the hospitality of roof and bed and board, but withholds that more handsome entertainment, the hospitality of himself. His estate dwindles daily in the hands of a hireling agent, but he does not care so long as he is left alone. He shrinks from life like an owl from daylight. He believes himself and his house cursed, and does not know, poor soul, that he might break free

with one wriggle. And yet—the hypnotism of his surroundings! How many of us, I wonder, caught in that web of time and silence and memory, would have the courage or strength to cut ourselves out of it? We are all enmeshed in some net of destiny, we grind at our futile occupations, and walk with a great show of vivacity upon our ineffectual treadmill; are they only the foolish who acquiesce in the creeping stupor of routine? I think they are; and yet, on the other hand, it is only the very brave who keep cutting at the net when it grows too close, and breast again into the free sea of life. We think that we run singly in the race against time until habit, of whom we had so long a start, silently overtakes us.

And so back to my old lord, doting in his library of memoirs, poring upon the lives of others while his own life beats away in hypnotic unison with the hours and the chiming clock and the sea roaring

for ever below the terraced garden. Mark him well, for he and his house are a bit of old Ireland; fast fading and being exterminated before the invasion of events; but clinging still upon the very skirts of change. I defy you to live in that house for a week, and not to have your voice and pulse subdued to its melancholy note. The servants are like ghosts in their apparition; the very furniture is disposed as if it were eternally performing a solemn quadrille, to which your presence is an interruption; and your consciousness is in those empty chambers absorbed by the ticking of clocks, which are the voices of time and of silence.

All over Ireland are planted these minute and aristocratic settlements. The landlords, where they are resident, are often anchored to their estates by no better chain than that of poverty, and would gladly be off and shake the dust of the country from their feet. The social

trend of the last half-century has been weaning many of them gradually from the patriotism which remains so tragically in the peasant classes. Their interests are outside Ireland; the roar of London is in their ears, and the stagnation of affairs in their own country has in many cases disgusted them even with the duties of public life. The Land Bill of 1903 will very likely weed out the discontented landlords, setting those free who wish to be set free, and establishing those who wish to remain in a more suitable prosperity. One cannot but deplore the constant social emigration from Ireland, which is, in its own small way, as remarkable as the greater emigration of the population. Its reason is all too obvious. When Dublin was a week's journey from London it was the metropolis of Ireland, and the landowners had their town houses in Dublin, where they met in the season and formed a metropolitan society. In its best days Dublin society

was brilliant and Irish; its decline has been simply in proportion to the absence of Irish and the introduction of English ideas. When the railways and the steamships brought Dublin within a day's journey of London, visits there became more and more frequent; until gradually those landlords who could afford town houses established them in London and deserted Dublin; and even those who could not, spent what money and leisure they had in visits to the greater metropolis.

The Viceregal influence, moreover, as it became of less importance to the good Irish families, gradually fell in dignity until it reached its present rather contemptible plight. I think that every one whose knowledge of the country is intelligent and sympathetic is agreed that the Viceregal system has ceased to have any value that it may once have possessed. It is, even on the social side, but a poor make-

shift. It is an alien, and in some hands may be an unsympathetic establishment in the heart of the country. The best that an intelligent Viceroy can do is to ingratiate himself with the Irish public; the worst that he can do is to bring the name of England into dislike and contempt. And all the time he must go through the mummery of a mimic court, presentation to which is of no value, involves no social qualification, confers no social distinction. It has long failed, from a social point of view, to attract the most intelligent side of Irish society, and has become little more than a concession to the newly rich, and to the trading classes of Dublin, in whom it is apt to foster false and artificial social ideas. It is now in Dublin the centre of snobbery. Its officials and *entourage* are not Irish, but the friends and relations of the English Viceroy. A little glittering cloud of parasites, invested with a mimic dignity, and often impudent and intolerant

in their public behaviour—small wonder if they fail to attract the notice or regard of a people essentially aristocratic, and possessed of a native breeding and culture which instruct them by instinct in the true value of such petty dignities.

No one, however, can visit Dublin to-day and study its society without wishing that there was still some social force which might bring together the vestiges of the old, and form the nucleus of a new brilliancy. For the material is there, a material that lends itself to moulding in clever hands. On this matter I cannot help thinking that the wonderfully successful visit of King Edward to Ireland in the summer of 1903 has some bearing. I have a small enough notion of the importance of royalty in the real affairs of life; and yet, I think, if it has any use at all, it might throw its influence in Ireland upon a useful side. I cannot but think that the popularity of that visit struck a blow at the

Viceregal system, from which it will not easily recover, even though it found that system in such capable and sympathetic hands as those of Lord Dudley. The idea of a Royal residence in Ireland has often been adventured, but while Queen Victoria was alive it was, for many reasons, an impossible one. Now, however, things have a different aspect, and if it would be possible for the King or the Prince of Wales to spend a few months of every year in Ireland I am certain that it would not do any harm, and it might do a great amount of good. What is needed at present with many Irish people is that they should have a hopeful interest in their country restored. Once they begin to take that interest, they will find in it much that at present they think can only be found outside it; and to abolish the sham trappings of a Viceregal court, and (if a court there must be) to substitute for it an occasional Royal court, would accomplish

two benefits. It would send about their business a great many people who now hang round the porches of the Castle; and it would attract again to Dublin some of those Irish people of importance in whose train would come many interests and activities. A Royal settlement as an end would be ridiculous; but, as a means, I cannot but think that it would restore something that Ireland has for many years lost.

Failing this, the plight of Dublin remains a melancholy one, for it is the one city of the British Isles in which an intellectual society might rule, in which money would not, as it never has yet been allowed to do in Ireland, interfere with other more important qualifications, and where, in the nature and charm of the people, you have a social ingredient more valuable even than that of the French. I have seen a more contemptible kind of snobbery in Dublin than I have seen anywhere else;

and I have also found, often hidden and entrenched behind the dignities of pride and poverty, more human charm and interest, more brilliancy and mental alertness, more accomplishment in the human art of personal interchange, more kindness and sympathetic readiness, than is to be found beyond the borders of this land of tears and smiles.

VII

THE IRISH REVIVAL

It is pleasant to turn from so close a scrutiny of exhaustion and decay to the more bracing picture of active reconstruction. So steady a downward progression never fails to stimulate wise and active spirits to an attempt at arresting the fatal tendency; and Ireland has for many years been the subject of earnest thought and experiment on the part of reformers. The trouble has been that until quite lately these individual efforts lacked co-ordination and consolidation; and that, while the decadence of the country was single and solid, the efforts put forth to counteract it were exerted in a hundred different direc-

tions, and were in many cases exerted more against each other than in a united attempt to break the headlong slide to misfortune. It was not until a very few years ago that any serious effort was made to organise this healthy opposition; and although it is still sadly lacking in unity of method the greater part of it has been collected into two considerable forces, both of which are designed to act in the same useful direction. One is concerned entirely with the economic and material side of Irish life, and the other is directed upon its mind and heart, with the object of toning and stimulating them into a vigorous rebellion against disease.

This second force is represented by the Gaelic League, which has no less tremendous an ambition than the restoration of the sense of pride and race to the Irish, and the rebuilding of a nationality which has been gradually becoming merged and lost amid the spreading influences of the Anglo-

Saxon world. The theory upon which Dr. Douglas Hyde and his friends are working is that Ireland is suffering from what they call "West Britonism," and that in its effort to become a healthy Ireland, it must be cured of being an unhealthy part of England; in a word, that it must be de-Anglicised. I have said before that the truly Irish parts of Ireland are its poorest parts, and that wherever you find a measure of material prosperity, you find along with it a tendency to imitate English life and to absorb English ideas. This tendency I have shown to be inevitable where the prosperity which it accompanies is directly due to English trade, English money, and English methods; for all over the world, where two communities, speaking the same tongue, are engaged in commerce with each other, the smaller and weaker tends to become absorbed in the greater and more powerful. But what if they spoke a different language? What

if their industries began to be developed on more individual lines, and began to take the form not of mere imitation, but of a thing evolved out of their own economic and national conditions?

That is the question. We know that if bulk of trade and union of aggressive interests alone are considered the day of the small nation is at an end; that, with the ideas of empire now prevailing among the great powers of the world, it is held justifiable in the interests of progress to violate small nationalities, and absorb them for what is deemed to be the common good into the great nations which surround them. But we are not all agreed that this swallowing up of nationalities will tend to make the world a happier place. The obliteration of frontiers is one thing; the extinction of racial and national qualities quite another. You may burn out a country, and think that you have devastated a people; but something lingers in the soil

and atmosphere of that country, in the blood of its exiled remnant, that it is beyond the power of armies to destroy; and from the ashes of its burning that spirit rises again in new and undreamed-of influences. The racial spirit may be diluted and weakened by admixture until its qualities combine in the direction of a new race, or it may be weakened within and die of its own rot; but it is not and cannot be destroyed from without. I take it to be some form of this truth that is inspiring the Irish revival.

The ambition is splendid in its valour and insolence, for it opposes itself to nothing less than the momentum of the civilised world. There is a great deal of what plain men call nonsense in the Celtic movement, and there is a vast deal of humbug and vapouring among its exponents and supporters; but when all these have been allowed for, there remains in it a vital and powerful principle. The

enthusiasts tell us that the Celtic spirit is reviving and will come to its own again. The contemptuous say that it is merely not dead yet, and that its present activity is but the leaping up of its embers; but the fact remains that the thing is still there, alive and to be reckoned with. Whether a nation restored to the prime of Celticism would be a desirable thing is a point upon which the most patriotic men might reasonably entertain some doubts; for the Celtic temperament may be likened to certain kinds of Madeira wine, admirable when blended with those of another character, but in themselves strangely unfulfilling the promise of their quality. The stormy poetry, the visionary glooms, the devouring activity which will carry on to all but victory and then leave victory ungrasped in a sudden paralysis of langour and ineptitude — these qualities endow the lives of men with deep fulfilment and a splendid unrest, but they do not make

for material advancement. It is perhaps better for the world's health that her dreamers and poets should be scattered and distributed over a wide area of life than that there should be a whole nation of them, which would not itself be happy, nor contribute anything to the sum of the world's happiness. But these are speculations, and are only incident to the main question. We may take it that there will never be an Ireland in which the old Celticism is restored as though the hands of time had been put back a thousand years; but that consideration in no way affects the value or significance of the revival movement.

That it has a healthy influence over Ireland at present no one who knows anything of the subject can deny, for it acts like an antidote upon the religious poison. How sorely something of the kind was needed may be judged by the way in which the fire of this movement has caught and

spread. Within a few years the numbers of its adherents have leaped from hundreds to hundreds of thousands; and amongst Irish people it is no mere literary cult as it is elsewhere, but a real and living thing. The spread of the Irish language in the last few years is a matter of common knowledge and wonder. Difficult of learning as that language even in its modern form is even to those whose grandfathers spoke and used it, the study of it is the patient and successful occupation of thousands upon thousands of Irish peasants. It is a language tender and beautiful of expression, with words in it which convey ideas that the words of no other language can convey; and the ideas have remained, although the names for them had very nearly vanished. It is the perfect vehicle of imagination and emotion. And the Church, with its customary cunning, has not been slow to recognise this. The priests are among the most ready and

valuable helpers in this Irish movement, partly because they do not recognise its essential Paganism, and partly because it was a thing which the Church could countenance without immediate danger to itself, which gave it an opportunity of showing sympathy where others were discouraging and unsympathetic; and the priest who speaks Irish has got one more hold and influence over those with whom he works. As an Irishman said to me once when discussing the comparative effects of a sermon in Irish and in English: "The priest might be rattlin' away for an hour in English and niver a tear; but in five minutes of the Irish he'd have the people howlin' and roarin' and weepin' tumblerfuls." Other Irishmen, tinctured with crude ideas of progress culled from the deluge of cheap and vapid printed matter that has already found its way into their country, argue that, since English is the "language of commerce," to teach the children Irish

is only a waste of time; and that book-keeping by double entry would more suitably occupy their infant minds. So that even in Ireland, you see, the pulse of the world reverberates; and the ambition to make of one's offspring a black-coated clerk has thrilled even in this land of dreams. These views, however, are but rarely met with, and as a whole the Irish people have welcomed the restoration of their language with open arms.

The language is the fountain-head from which the whole Irish movement springs; as it is restored and developed, the old poetry and music which are by no means extinct will, it is hoped, become revived with a new vigour. And with the poetry and music come the games and dances, the old crafts and the old social gatherings. The mere assembling of the people in remote places for the Irish classes has already been as a god-send. It has furnished them with a social communion

other than that of the chapel or public-house; it has given them a common interest and a subject for discussion. The more literary side of the movement is represented by such people as Mr. George Moore, Mr. Yeats, Mr. Edward Martyn, and Mr. Standish O'Grady; but upon the literary side of it, as it appeals to the outside world, little depends. I confess that the taking up of the Celtic movement as a cult by those who have nothing in common with its governing spirit or its ideals, seems to me little better than an affectation, and tends to lead people who might be more practically employed to dwell only upon the picturesqueness, the beauty, and the "glamour" of Irish poverty. It is not good for well-fed people to dwell upon the picturesque attributes of those who have not enough to eat.

But in whatever light their national work may appear to the outside world, these Irish literary men who have taken

this revival up so heartily have provided a much-needed stimulus to productive activities among their countrymen, and already there has been a small crop of writers of Irish verse which, minor though it be, has a quality that dares one to hope that the old country may again find its tongue. It is a strange and melancholy fact that a country peopled by poets produces no great poet for the benefit of the world. You will hear peasants in Ireland talking among themselves in a language of imagery and imagination that an Englishman would not understand, and that is indeed seldom found outside the world of written poetry. A typical example of this remains with me in the words of an old Kerry peasant who had been evicted from his holding, and was living with his wife in a little hut high up on the mountain-side overlooking the stretches of the Kenmare river. Broad in the view lay Dereen, which he

said was "the sweetest spot under the shining sun." My friend, who had been talking to him about his holding, expressed a hope that he would be reinstated, and that there were good days in store for him yet. "Ah," was his reply—"Ah, niver that, your Honour's Ladyship; here my wife and I, 'tis like periwinkles on the strand we do be, and 'tis there we will lie till the Almighty do gather us." Such conversation is the common currency of the land, and it is a natural question to ask why, if the minds of the people are so filled with poetry and imagery, they do not produce a great poet. The reason I am sure is to be found in the lack of any human stimulus to production. An artist, be he poet or painter or musician, must not only have temperament but he must have training; and where is the training for the poor Irishman who is born an artist? He has been lucky if he has learned to read and write; luckier still if,

having learned to read, he has had anything to read but his book of devotions and an occasional sight of a Roman Catholic newspaper. And the great education for which reading is in some part a substitute—the education of social contact and exchange of ideas with minds of a hundred different shades and outlooks—that education has been altogether denied him. He has little or no social intercourse with his fellows; and even love, that first great unsealer of the springs of poetry, is in his case so drilled and restricted that it is not a free thing, nor spontaneous in its expression; it is but the vestibule to a squalid matrimony, and poor enough in the exercise which it affords to his soul.

All these evils the Irish movement tends to combat. How far its tendency will go, at what point it will be arrested by some sudden diversion of public interest in more material things, it would be

hard to say; but that it will be so arrested at some not far distant point in its career I have very little doubt. Its work, however, will have been none the less well worth doing for that, and its success will not have to be measured by the stated aims of its founders. We must have an ideal, an ambition, a goal in all things if we are to achieve anything; and the farther from possibility of attainment our goal is, the farther towards attainment shall we reach. It is at any rate probable that this healthy movement will go on long enough to bring it into violent and active opposition to the Church. For, paradox though it may seem, anything really national in Ireland must ultimately come to grips with the national religion. And this movement is so healthy and so vigorous, it is so wholesome and comforting, it lays so fine a foundation and provides so sound an education that it can hardly fail, before its work is done,

to loosen the national incubus. But if it does nothing else, it will have taught the Irishman the meanness of imitating other people, and a wholesome shame of being anything but himself.

VIII

THE NEW ECONOMY

If we now draw together the various threads that we have been following, we find that they lead us to but one conclusion: that the Irish are in so low a condition, national, physical, and mental, as to be practically helpless. Intellect and energy have alike been drained out of them until nothing remains but an enfeebled population only just able to struggle on from hand to mouth, and with neither strength nor initiative to spare for revolt or reform. The great question of what can be done for such a people has for many years past been occupying the minds of Irishmen of intelligence and influence,

until the disease of Ireland has come to have a rather unwholesome interest for them. Of this little group almost every one has his own nostrum, and writes his own pamphlet, and sets forth the one and only cure for the ills of the country; but among most of them the interest is morbid and hypochondriacal, while the remedies proposed are generally insignificant and useless.

We have glanced at one of the two great ameliorating influences which are getting to work, and we now turn to the second, which concerns itself entirely with material problems. It is chiefly represented by a group of men who have conceived and are putting into execution a great and far-reaching organisation for the alleviation of Ireland's economic and social troubles. One could hardly imagine a more dull or inhuman title than "The Department of Agricultural and Technical Instruction"; and yet this Government

department, which is the outward form in which are embodied the ideas of Sir Horace Plunkett and a few other able Irishmen, is probably as human an organisation as ever masqueraded under the name of a Government department. Most of the things which are anathema to the ordinary official mind are conspicuously present in it. There is indiscretion, from Sir Horace Plunkett downwards; I should not wonder if indiscretion were even encouraged. There are also invention, originality, the encouragement of initiative amongst officials, and permission for officials to work entirely on their own lines, so long as their aims and results correspond with the aims of the department; there is above all humanity, a personal, human interest in work that is itself very human indeed. Running through the whole system of this immense organisation there is also the inspiration of personality, the personality of its head.

It is impossible to think of "The Department" (as it is affectionately and familiarly termed) without thinking of Sir Horace Plunkett. In him is a fortunate combination of the very qualities which Ireland needs in those who are to help her from within, but which are rarely found except in those who have neither the means nor the leisure to devote themselves to public work. He has a force and simplicity of mind seldom to be found remaining in a man whose education has followed that conventional course which begins at Eton; he has idealism combined with practical astuteness, and a shrewd idea of the use of means towards a desired end; he is very nearly, if not altogether free from the mental entanglements which so often hamper even a fine intellect in men of his class; his patriotism is of that direct and genuine kind that loves first of all its own soil and its own people; his ambitions are entirely non-material, and

are concerned with the ultimate perfection of his work, and not at all with his own glory or credit. Above all, he has that valuable gift of inspiring others, of playing upon men as upon the pipes of an organ, of using and disposing them so that the individual merit of each shall have its full and free expression in the harmony of his scheme. An extreme personal seriousness and reserve, combined with a curious diffidence in public speech, will always prevent Sir Horace Plunkett from being a platform favourite with the crowds; he is essentially one whose best work is done in the background, or in the small and sympathetic community of men who are inspired and guided by him.

The task of this great department is neither more nor less than the teaching of the Irish how to live. It is not merely to foster trades and industries, to help agriculture or to assist enterprise; it is literally to teach the people to live. And therefore

most wisely its work has begun down among the very foundations of economic and social life. The scheme is a gigantic one; and it is one of the disgraces of the educated classes in Ireland that it has been left to a small group to give it intelligent and sympathetic study, and that half the men of education and ability whom you may meet in Ireland, while they do not hesitate to abuse it roundly, are shamefully ignorant of its very aims and scope. "Creameries and Dreameries" remains in my mind as a significant description of Sir Horace Plunkett's work by a man of intelligence and patriotism, who is himself engaged in an economic experiment of no small interest and public value. And creameries and dreameries it remains in the minds of a great many people who might well be ashamed to stand by, coining nicknames for an experiment that may prove the economic salvation of Ireland, but not putting forth a hand

to help. I say "may prove"; for even regarded as an experiment of which the chances of success and non-success are even, the work of this department is a hundred times worth doing. In a country of waning vitality and resources almost any experiment which has even a chance of success, however costly it may be, is justified. To put it in an almost absurdly simple form, it could do no possible harm, while it may do an incalculable good; and they are really the dreamers who, while their country is failing and weakening, choose to sit in the seat of the scorner.

But deliberately unintelligent views on the part of intelligent men are always the most difficult to combat. Ignorance is the basis of most of the enmity which has assailed this scheme in Ireland, and people either will not or cannot see that it is working for results so great and far-reaching that its investments of money and energy cannot be judged by a merely

commercial standard. I have said that the department's work is essentially that of a teacher, and a teacher in the whole art and business of life; and that is only another way of saying that it is essentially a helping and fostering agency. It is there to teach people to help themselves; not to relieve them of effort, but to encourage and direct their efforts. It is there to develop what is latent and untaught in the people; it is there not to wean them from their own ideas and methods so much as to show them how, by association and co-operation, by all that in its purest sense the word education means, their own ideas can be far more fully realised, and the result of their own efforts increased a hundred-fold. Nothing is too small or too big for this unique department to be interested in. It will patiently explain to some old lady living in a mud cabin on the mountain-side how by doing certain intelligent things she can get a better price for her eggs. It

will teach an ignorant peasant who, without any knowledge of farming, is trying to farm his few acres, what seeds are best suited to his soil, what treatment that soil needs to make it productive, how to sow his crops, how to protect them against threatened diseases, how to reap and harvest them. It will help the people who are making carpets by teaching them not only enlightened methods of manufacture, but it will give them technical instruction in the use and preparation of dyes, and teach them drawing and design. In a word, no one who wants to work and to live in Ireland and who goes for help to it will be refused; and all over the country its activities are humming. Here it has an agent laying out an instruction farm as an object-lesson for those who believe that nothing more can be done than they have been doing for years past; and there, far away on the sun-warmed rocks of the Kerry shore, another of its agents is sitting

talking to a fisherman, and explaining to him that if he keeps his nets clean and dry, and mends them with the right kind of material when they are broken, his fishing will certainly become more prosperous and lucrative.

For it is just things like this that, taken for granted in more advanced countries, have to be patiently taught in Ireland. It is not so much the hands of the people that need to be trained as their minds; and most of all do they need to be taught those great principles of co-operation and mutual help which are opposed to the natural instinct of the isolated and primitive mind. And it is in this direction that the earliest results of reconstructive work may be looked for. Indeed they are already apparent, but they are yet in the stage of being examples by contrast to the rest of the country rather than a genuine and far-spreading principle of its life as a whole. Co-operative dairies have already had a

great and solid success in improving the condition of those engaged in dairy-farming; and an equally striking success has been that achieved by the introduction of the Raiffeisen Banks, which are gradually exterminating the gombeen man. They have been established since 1895 in the poorest districts, and the fact that there are now over a hundred of them and that not a single instance of default has occurred is remarkable evidence of their success. By the co-operation of credit it is now possible for the man who had to sell his pig or his cow prematurely in order to pay his rent, to wait until a more profitable moment; and the same applies to the selling of crops.

These tiny margins of a few pounds, it must be remembered, make the difference to the Irish peasant between solvency and insolvency, between plenty and starvation, between misery and happiness; and it is upon such minute matters as the condition

of a pig here and the packing of a few dozen eggs there, the making of a few pounds of butter in this place and the harvesting and the selling of a few bushels of wheat in that, that any constructive reform in the life of Ireland must begin. A typical instance of the apparent failure and real success of these minute experiments was afforded in a part of Ireland in which I was staying. A branch of the department had sent an instructor to initiate some of the cottagers into the planting of orchards; and several little orchards of apple trees had been duly planted. The occasion of my visit was the moment at which the first crops were expected, and I think there was just one apple produced by all the trees of all the orchards. Complete and ludicrous failure, the scoffers would say; but if they had spoken to the cottagers who had been waiting for the apple crop they would not have said so, for the mere failure of the

crop was an instruction in itself. The whole business of planting and trenching had exercised their minds and intelligence to an unwonted degree, and the very failure of their crop had a far more stimulating and memorable result on their minds than if a rosy harvest had appeared at the magic touch of the Government wand. They realised that not sun and shower alone, not spring and autumn, but their own labour and intelligence were needed to procure the results. The mere causes of failure were an education in themselves.

All this makes an enormous demand upon the patience of those who are conducting so elaborate and delicate an experiment, and the faith required for perseverance in it is great. And for that reason I think the more shame of those who permit themselves to stand outside the circle of endeavour and attempt to discourage it by their derision. Jealousy and bitterness, and a lamentable lack of

intellectual cohesion are at the root of much of this enmity on the part of men who are otherwise both intelligent and patriotic; but it cannot be a pleasant consideration for them that if any large success crown this patient and unwearied endeavour it will be in spite of their discouragement, and not because of their help.

Sir Horace Plunkett's Department is by far the most considerable and scientific of the many organisations that exist for the betterment of Ireland, but it by no means absorbs all the energies that it ought to absorb, or combines all the efforts that it ought to combine. Constructive endeavour is far too much split and divided in Ireland, and the name of societies, all existing for the same ultimate end, is legion. There is the Congested Districts Board, for example, which did splendid service before the formation of the department, but the work of which is now

practically done, such occupations as remain to it coming much more properly under the administration of the department itself. There is the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, which is in a way the parent of the new department, and is practically under its direction. There is the smaller Irish Industries Association, and there are dozens of other small consolidations of thought and effort which in many cases are working against each other or at any rate over-lapping each other, and which ought to be amalgamated into the one great constructive organisation. There is also much individual effort being exerted in Ireland, half the result of which is frustrated by the petty and unworthy jealousy that exists between the promoters of various schemes. It is indeed sad when they are all working for the same end that they should be as bitterly opposed to each other as though they were so many

religious sects. As time goes on and as a slow but sure accumulation of results grows under the work of the central department, one can only hope that these many admirable individual workers will, even at the cost of some little compromise, join themselves to the chief power, and work with it for the common good.

Some of the schemes seem excellent and promising,[1] others hopeless and unsound; but ridicule or discouragement is the very last thing which should be directed against honest effort on behalf of others; and if only some of the rivals among the many experimenters would take

[1] Among the chief of these I may instance the striking and already successful experiment made by Mr. James M'Cann, M.P., in County Meath. Taking advantage of the canalisation of the Boyne he has, by the provision of suitable boats, made it possible for small tenant-farmers to sell small produce profitably, which formerly the rates of carriage made impossible; and in the district of Teltown, in which the experiment has been made, the result has been nothing less than the substitution of prosperity for extreme poverty. The price at which the tenants can purchase coal, for example, has fallen from 30s. to 17s. per ton. The future of this experiment will be watched with great interest.

that view, I make no doubt that they would help on the economic prosperity of Ireland in a surprising degree. For it is always worth while to try; the making of an effort is a virtue in itself; and enthusiasm was never the worse for a dash of indiscretion. The expenditure of individual effort for a common end, the attempt to attain an ideal which may seem impossible, the ambition to throw one's self upon a big chance and sink or swim by the result, the virtue of not being afraid to fail—it is these that make for human progress and that help the world forward in the only direction which seems to promise light amid the glooms of its whirling and mysterious destiny.

It will be seen that I have presented two pictures of Ireland which are in apparent contrast and contradiction. We have seen an Ireland stagnant under decay and social misrule, a land of people

isolated, despondent, of waning energies and without any but spiritual ambitions; and we have also seen an Ireland apparently humming like an April hive with the business of labour and construction, and upon every hand hope and the prospect of reform. The two pictures are indeed in contrast, but unfortunately they are not in contradiction. For the first and gloomy picture is the Ireland of fact, while the second is still a land of thought and dream. It is true that activity and endeavour resound throughout its borders, but at the most it is but the house that is being built; there is no beginning yet of the happier life that is to inhabit it; or rather it is not even the house that is growing, but a scaffolding within which we may hope to see the new house rise. The need and condition of Ireland may in fact be estimated by the contrast between the great work which has already been expended on the founda-

tions of reform, and the utterly small apparent result which it has had on the life of the country. What the chances are that the new economy will prosper and succeed is a question that none of us can help asking ourselves; and yet it is one to which there can be no very sure answer. The drag on one side is so heavy, with all the pull of ages of ignorance and superstition at the end of the chain; and it is a chain that cannot be struck off, but which the reformers must drag upwards with them in the hope that some of the slime of years may drop away from it as it rises. And darkly over all broods the strange spirit of this land, an erratic and unknown quantity which may either lend itself to the work of reconstruction or may chafe and break away from the mild discipline of effort.

There is much that is encouraging and much that is discouraging to hope; but there is one solid fact which, so far as

it goes, seems to point towards success. It is a common superstition that the Irish are an ungovernable people, and it is a superstition typical of the ignorance of public opinion about Ireland. For they have been governed as never were a people governed before by the Church of Rome; and if that magnificent but now out-of-date organisation can govern them, why should not an organisation formed on their own needs and in their own time also produce an ordered and happier life for them? I do not speak now of the spiritual government of the Church, but of its temporal government, which is complete and, for its own ends, successful. Ultimately, of course, the people or their religion must go; their aims are antagonistic, and one must finally destroy the other. The promise of the new economy is that it is splendidly secular, and at the same time non-aggressive to the cherished ideals of the people. It is entirely

sympathetic; and if it succeeds it will be because it has fought with a mightier weapon than any of mere aggression or destruction, with the great militant force of doing its own work, proving its own case, giving to the people something better worth having instead of merely taking away from them something which may be better than nothing.

We leave the subject with a question for our sole conclusion. To see Ireland as she is and as she might be is all that is possible for those who do not care to let prophecy, however confident, close their minds upon a vital subject. But to realise her as she is now can alone help us in the future to judge the success or failure of what is being attempted. In the scroll of her history are treasured records which are by some accounted as equal to a promise for the future. But the world moves on; there is no return of evil or good days; what comes, comes new from the

fount of destiny; and what of past pride and joy we keep are but lamps hung in the pavilions of memory, that may hearten and make cheer for us indeed, but can throw only a dim radiance on the hidden hours of to-morrow.

POSTSCRIPT

If truth were absolute, who would dare to risk a statement? If modesty were all, one might sit silent until the crack of doom; and even if perfect equipment were possible, old age would find us still waiting to be equipped. These must serve as my excuses for presenting, without modest affectations, what I do not dream of claiming to be the whole truth about Ireland. There is in my view only one kind of truth attainable, and that is the truth of things as they appear to one's self, however sharply they may seem to contradict the truth as seen by men of wider experience and greater discretion; and I claim that

the essential grain of truth which resides in all impressions sincerely received and honestly recorded, resides in these pages. I have known Ireland more or less all my life; but I confess that there were things driven into me in the course of the last two months which I spent there that seemed to demand some attempt at explanation. The object of this essay is not to satisfy interest in Irish affairs, but to arouse it; and it is addressed without misgiving to those men and women of intelligence to whom the eternal conflict in the world of old and new, of right and not right, of truth and untruth, is of absorbing and perennial interest. They, I know, will be the first to forgive the obvious defects of my work.

There remains with me one misgiving. In the necessarily broad and general statements with regard to the Roman Church in Ireland I may seem to have wronged many a priest who is manfully working

for the common and ultimate good. I have the best of reasons for knowing that in Ireland the ranks of holy orders contain not a few—Roman, Anglican, or Presbyterian—who are worthy disciples of the first and simple Christianity. But the facts remain ; and the lives of men and women continue, in spite of any individual influence, to be darkened by the crushing rule of the Church. How like its spirit to that vain worship of which it was said, that its teaching is only the commands of men ; how different from that of the band of plain men who wandered by the summer shore of Galilee, mad with the inspiration of their joyous gospel.

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